ARGOSY

10¢
CANADA 15c
WEEKLY
AUG. 3

FLIGHT TO SINGAPORE

Fast-Moving Short Novel by
DONALD BARR CHIDSEY

YAQUI GOLD

Exciting Serial by
E. HOFFMANN PRICE

Also New Fiction by
KURT STEEL, JOHN MYERS MYERS
and **JIM KJELGAARD**

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"AND TO THINK . . .

I might have lost you!"

"I DON'T KNOW how I could ever have been such a fool, Betsy . . . such a careless, unthinking idiot . . ."

"Don't say that, darling. It was partly my fault, too. I should have told you . . . said something. But it's such an embarrassing subject to talk about—a person's breath! I didn't know how to tell you."

"It'll never happen again, dearest. I've learned my lesson—plenty. Thank heaven Bill saw the way things were going with us. And did he give me the devil about it, too! . . . Told me point-blank what the trouble was, and asked me how I expected any girl to stay in love with a man who constantly offended that way."*

Many Offend Without Realizing It

What else can ruin romance so quickly as halitosis* (bad breath)? And the worst of it is that if you yourself have this insidious condition you may not even know it . . . or even realize that you are offending.

In some cases halitosis is due to systemic conditions which call for treatment by your doctor. But usually . . . and fortunately . . . bad breath is due, say some authorities, to the fermentation of tiny food particles on tooth, gum, and mouth surfaces.

Sweetens the Breath

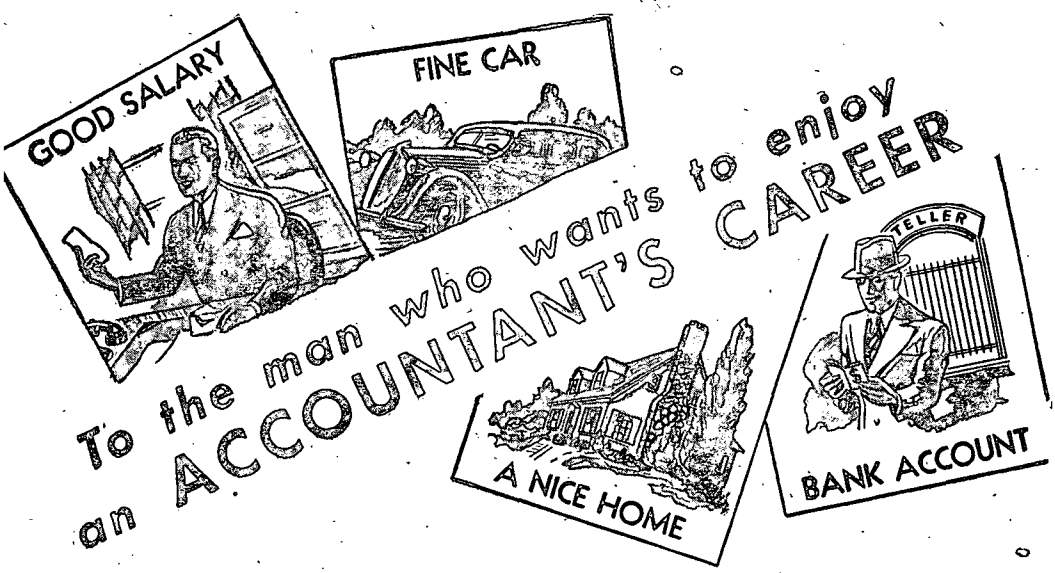
Listerine Antiseptic quickly halts such fermentation, and then overcomes the odors it causes. The breath becomes sweeter, fresher, more agreeable—less likely to offend.

If you are a heavy smoker you'll find Listerine Antiseptic almost invaluable. It does such a grand job of combating tobacco odors and ridding the mouth of that stale, musty taste caused by excessive smoking.

In any case, if you want people to like you . . . if you want to be at your best . . . make a habit of using Listerine Antiseptic before all important engagements. It may pay you real dividends in social and business success.

LAMBERT PHARMACAL COMPANY, *St. Louis, Mo.*

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



IF you're that man, here's something that will interest you.

Not a magic formula—not a get-rich-quick cheme—but something more substantial, more practical.

Of course, you need something more than just the lesire to be an accountant. You've got to pay the price —be willing to study earnestly, thoroughly.

Still, wouldn't it be worth your while to sacrifice some f your leisure in favor of interesting home study—over comparatively brief period in your life? Always pro- ided that the rewards were good—a salary of $2,000 o $10,000?

An accountant's duties are interesting, varied and of eal worth to his employers. He has *standing!*

Do you feel that such things aren't for you? Well, on't be too sure. Very possibly they *can* be!

Why not, like so many before you, investigate aSalle's modern Problem Method of training for an ccountancy position?

Just suppose you were permitted to work in a large ccounting house under the personal supervision of an xpert accountant. Suppose, with his aid, you studied ccounting principles and solved problems day by day —easy ones at first—then the more difficult ones. If you ould do this—and if you could turn to him for advice s the problems became complex—soon you'd master hem all.

That's the training you follow in principle under the aSalle Problem Method.

You cover accountancy from the basic Principles right up through Accountancy Systems and Income Tax Procedure. Then you add C. P. A. Training and prepare for the C. P. A. examinations.

As you go along, you absorb the principles of Auditing, Cost Accounting, Business Law, Statistical Control, Organization, Management and Finance.

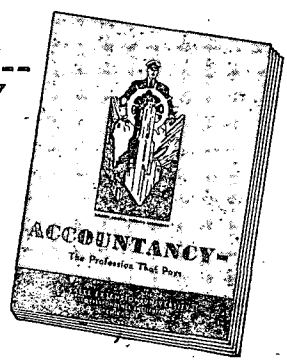
Your progress is as speedy as you care to make it—depending on your own eagerness to learn and the time you spend in study.

Will recognition come? The only answer, as you know, is that success *does* come to the man who is really *trained.* It's possible your employers will notice your improvement in a very few weeks or months. Indeed, many LaSalle graduates have paid for their training—with increased earnings—before they have completed it! For accountants, who are trained in organization and management, are the executives of the future.

Write For This Free Book

For your own good, don't put off investigation of *all* the facts. Write for our free 48-page book, "Accountancy, The Profession That Pays." It'll prove that accountancy offers brilliant futures to those who aren't afraid of serious home study. Send us the coupon *now.*

Over 1850 Certified Public Accountants among LaSalle alumni



LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY

A CORRESPONDENCE INSTITUTION

101 S. Michigan Ave., Dept. 858-HR, Chicago, Ill.

I want to be an accountant. Send me, without cost or obligation, the 48-page book, "Accountancy, The Profession That Pays," and full information about your accountancy training program.

Name.....

Address.....City.....

Position.....Age.....

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ARGOSY

America's Oldest and Best All-Fiction Magazine

Volume 301 CONTENTS FOR AUGUST 3, 1940 Number 1

Flight to Singapore—*Complete Novel*.....Donald Barr Chidsey 6
Salute His Highness, Prince Mike of Kammorirri, the irrepressible royal bantam of Indo-China. Here he is again, merrily juggling rubies, thrones, and guns

Yaqui Gold—*Second of five parts*.....E. Hoffmann Price 38
The man who would lead his tribe must first conquer a genuine witch —as well as a Golden Goddess

Canned Judgment—*Short Story*.....George Masselman 60
Mr. Lamson ventures into dangerous territory to sample Polish ham and win a great sea victory

Dead of Night—*Sixth of seven parts*.....Kurt Steel 72
The astrologer who is too high-handed with the Heavens may find that stardust can explode

Legends of the Legionnaries—*Picture Feature*.....W. A. Windas 87
Lexicon of the Fighting Men

First Catch Your Beaver—*Short Story*.....Jim Kjelgaard 88
There's a lot that would-be Wild Bill Hickoks can learn about men— and killers. For lessons, apply Wayne McCloud

The Harp and the Blade—*Conclusion*.....John Myers Myers 97
Here's an ax for a fighter's head, and a farewell for Finnian from the people who learned to love him

Argonotes 112

Looking Ahead! 86

This magazine is on sale every Wednesday

A **RED STAR** *Magazine*

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, Publisher, 280 Broadway, NEW YORK, N. Y.
WILLIAM T. DEWART, President & Treasurer WILLIAM T. DEWART, JR., Secretary
PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE, 111 Rue Réaumur
LONDON: THE CONTINENTAL PUBLISHERS & DISTRIBUTORS, LTD., 3 La Belle Sauvage, Ludgate Hill, London, E.C. 4

Copyright, 1940, by Frank A. Munsey Company. Published weekly. Single copies 10 cents. By the year $4.00, in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; Canada, $5.00. Other countries, $7.00. Currency should not be sent unless registered. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Entered as second class matter November 28, 1896 at the post office, New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. The entire contents of this magazine are protected by copyright and must not be reprinted without the publisher's permission. Title registered in U. S. Patent Office. Copyrighted in Great Britain. Printed in U. S. A. *Manuscripts submitted to this magazine should be accompanied by sufficient postage for their return if found unavailable. The publisher can accept no responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts.*

Other **RED STAR** *Magazines*

FANTASTIC NOVELS • RED STAR MYSTERY • FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES • RED STAR ADVENTURES • CRACK-SHOT WESTERN • DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY • RED STAR DETECTIVE • CONFESSION NOVEL OF THE MONTH • RED STAR WESTERN • RED STAR LOVE REVELATIONS • FOREIGN LEGION ADVENTURES • RED STAR SECRET CONFESSIONS • DOUBLE DETECTIVE • ALL STORY-LOVE • BIG CHIEF WESTERN • LOVE NOVEL OF THE MONTH • CAVALIER CLASSICS • RAILROAD MAGAZINE

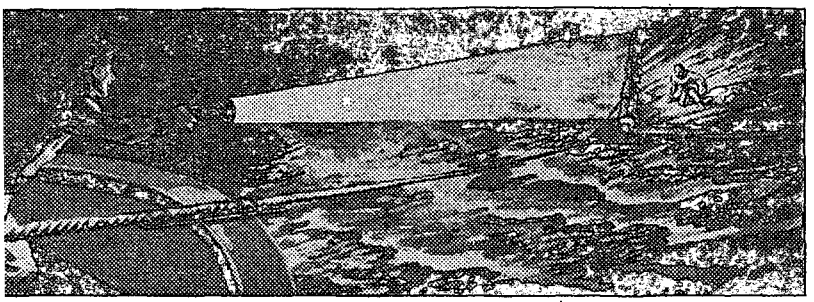
PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

TERROR STRICKEN, I LEAPT TOWARD THE SINISTER SHAPE!

rue experience of J. H. WILLIAMS, *Victoria, B. C.*

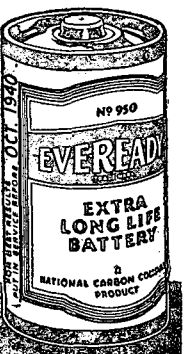
"ONE BLACK NIGHT I was returning to Vancouver, in my 15-foot inboard motorboat," writes Mr. Williams. "Suddenly, a dark and sinister shape loomed up directly ahead. There was no time to avoid it.

LEAPT as the boat shed into the object id found myself sit- g on a crossbeam of uge log boom that being towed by a ant tug. My boat gone. Shivering h cold, I shouted in n—the tug was too away for my voice each it.



TER HOURS OF TORTURE, the night became stormy and the tug skipper rtened his line. Again I shouted—and this time a flashlight on the tug picked out with its powerful beam. To the 'Eveready' *fresh* DATED batteries in *that* hlight I probably owe my life—and you can e it from me, *I* am an 'Eveready' convert now.

(Signed) J. H. Williams"



word "Eveready" is a registered trade-mark of National Carbon Co., Inc.

FRESH BATTERIES LAST LONGER... *Look for the* DATE-LINE

NATIONAL CARBON COMPANY, INC., 30 EAST 42nd STREET, NEW YORK, N. Y.

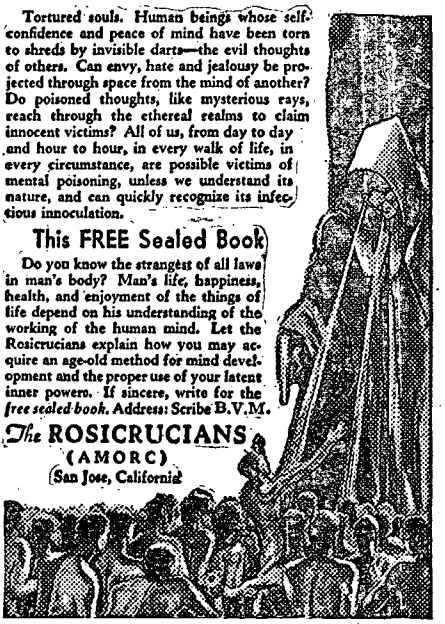
Unit of Union Carbide UCC *and Carbon Corporation*

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mental Poisoning!

Thoughts that Enslave Minds

Tortured souls. Human beings whose self-confidence and peace of mind have been torn to shreds by invisible darts—the evil thoughts of others. Can envy, hate and jealousy be projected through space from the mind of another? Do poisoned thoughts, like mysterious rays, reach through the ethereal realms to claim innocent victims? All of us, from day to day and hour to hour, in every walk of life, in every circumstance, are possible victims of mental poisoning, unless we understand its nature, and can quickly recognize its infectious innoculation.



This FREE Sealed Book

Do you know the strangest of all laws in man's body? Man's life, happiness, health, and enjoyment of the things of life depend on his understanding of the working of the human mind. Let the Rosicrucians explain how you may acquire an age-old method for mind development and the proper use of your latent inner powers. If sincere, write for the *free sealed book*. Address: Scribe B.V.M.

The ROSICRUCIANS
(AMORC)
San Jose, California

SHORT STORY WRITING PAYS BIG

Earn at Home in Spare Time

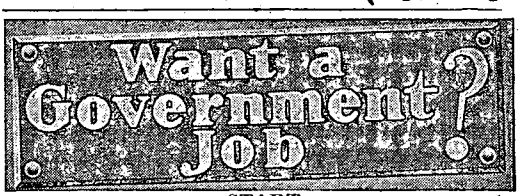
High cash prices are now being paid by leading magazines for short stories. The demand far exceeds the supply. Crystallize your desire to write. Hoosier Institute, *established in 1917*, has trained hundreds of men and women to become successful, highly paid writers. No previous experience necessary.

HOOSIER TEACHES YOU HOW TO WRITE
TELLS YOU WHERE TO SELL

Easy, step-by-step method endorsed by writers and editors. Personal Criticism helps you solve your individual problem. Manuscript Sales Service helps you sell your stories. F. Wolfe, of San Francisco has written, "I sold the first story I wrote to the first magazine to which I sent it." Others experience similar thrill. One graduate earned $5,000.00 with her pen, another won $250.00 prize for a story in national weekly.

FREE BOOK "The Art of Story Writing" will be sent to men and women interested in writing short stories for profit. Money-back arrangement. Easy terms. Tells how others succeeded and what opportunities await you. Write for free book today. Address:

HOOSIER INSTITUTE, 138 Hoosier Bldg., Chicago



START

$1260 to $2100 Year

Get Ready Immediately Men—Women 32-Page Civil Service Book FREE Mail Coupon today sure.

COUPON

FRANKLIN INSTITUTE
Dept. G251, Rochester, N. Y.

Sirs: Rush to me without charge (1) 32-page book with list of U. S. Government Big Paid jobs. (2) Tell me immediately how to qualify for one of these jobs.

Name.....

Address.....

RUPTURED

Get Relief This Proven Way

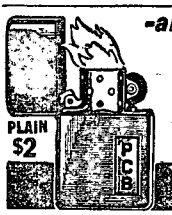
Why try to worry along with trusses that gouge flesh—press heavily on hips and spine—enlarge opening, fail to hold rupture? You need the Cluthe. No leg-st or cutting belts. Automatic adjustable pad holds at opening—follows every body movement with instan creased support in case of strain. Cannot slip whether work or play. Light. Waterproof. Can be worn in Send for amazing FREE book, "Advice To Ruptured" details of liberal truthful 60-day trial offer. Also end ments from grateful users in your neighborhood. W

CLUTHE SONS, Dept. 28, Bloomfield, New Jersey

BE A RAILWAY TRAFFIC INSPECTOR

Railway and Bus — Study in Spare
We will train you for a job as Passenger Inspector in a few months and on completi course place you in a position at up to $13 month, plus expenses to start, or refund tu We have openings. Agreeable, interesting Ask about our 21 years' experience in placin graduates. Free Booklet on request.

STANDARD BUSINESS TRAINING INSTIT
Div. 5008 Buffalo,



-and LIGHTS PIPES In a

ZIPPO ALWAYS WORKS, anywh in any weather. Permanent wick fuel supply, gadgetless design.
LIFETIME GUARANTEE (no one ever paid to repair a ZIPPO). ASK YOUR DEALER.
$3.00 with lifetime engraved initia color. Silver-like case. Shipped pos in Gift Box. Send for circular.
ZIPPO Mfg. Co., Dept. A, Bradford

ZIPPO Windproof LIGHTERS

Kills Lice Ants Fleas Aphids Bedbugs Crab Lice Potato Bugs Cabbage Worms

• DUST ON ONE SPOT • Mex. Bean Beetles

25c Everywhere. O-S Co., Elkridge, Md.

Free Dog Booklet

HAY-FEVER Quick Relief

Clarke's New Discovery Guaranteed.
Prevents and relieves Suffering without medicine or injections. Send 3¢ stamp for details. Prove it yourself!

CLARKE RESEARCH LABORATORY
363-D N. E. 76th Street, Miami, Florida

Classified Advertisemen

The Purpose of this Department is to put th reader in touch immediately with the newest need fuls for the HOME, OFFICE, FARM, or PERSON to offer, or seek, an unusual BUSINESS OPPOR TUNITY, or to suggest a service that may be per formed satisfactorily through correspondence. will pay a housewife or business man equally we to read these advertisements carefully.

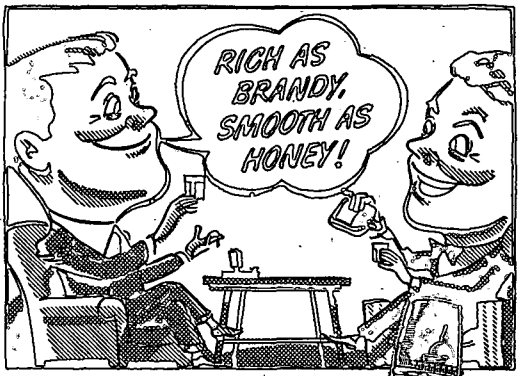
CORRESPONDENCE courses and educational books, slightly Sold. Rented. Exchanged. All subjects. Satisfaction guaranteed, paid for used courses. Complete details and bargain catalog F Write NELSON COMPANY, 500 Sherman, Dept. G214, Ch

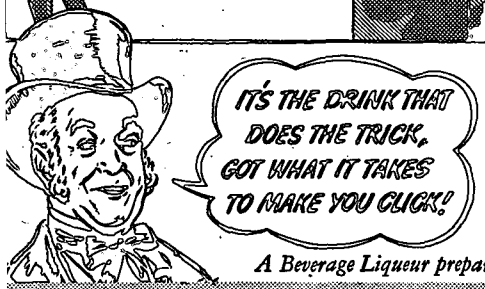
SONG POEMS WANTED

WANTED AT ONCE ORIGINAL POEMS
For musical setting. Publication, radio, recording service. Don't —send poem today for immediate consideration.
RICHARD BROS., 61 Woods Bldg., Chicago.

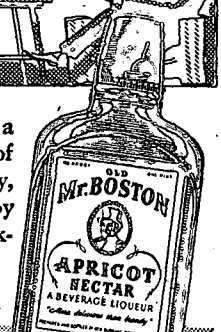
PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

OLD MR. BOSTON SAYS: "MY APRICOT NECTAR IS A TREAT YOU'LL CHEER!"





Mr. Boston's Apricot Nectar is a liquor with the tempting flavor of ripe apricots. "Rich as brandy, smooth as honey," you'll enjoy drinking it straight. A handy drinking cup tops each pint bottle.



A Beverage Liqueur prepared by Ben-Burk, Inc., Boston, Mass.

OLD MR. BOSTON APRICOT NECTAR

ALSO BLACKBERRY • PEACH • WILD CHERRY—70 PROOF

FREE TRIAL OFFER

NEW REMINGTON NOISELESS PORTABLE

AS LOW AS 10¢ A DAY

10-Day Free Trial Offer

AT LAST! The famous Remington NOISELESS Portable plus carrying Case is yours for only a small deposit and terms as little as ten cents a day. Brand new. Not rebuilt. Standard keyboard and every modern feature. Free typing instruction book. 10-Day free trial. You don't risk a penny. WE PAY ALL SHIPPING CHARGES. Act now! Write Remington Rand Inc., Dept. 145-8 465 Washington St., Buffalo, N.Y.

TIRED ALL THE TIME?

Try Building Up Your Endurance this Sensible, Easy Way

Lack your old pep? Feel down in the dumps? Get little digestive upsets every few days? If there's nothing organically wrong with you—then it's more than likely SLUGGISH DIGESTION is to blame. It can make that gas and bloated feeling; can give you heartburn, a dizzy head.

Start your DIGESTIVE JUICES FLOWING NORMALLY again. Set Fleischmann's live Yeast to work on those digestive-juice glands. It's a STIMULATOR; it starts the sluggish juices flowing faster. In test cases the speed of digestion was greatly increased. Then you should begin to FEEL SWELL, look A LOT BETTER. Get Fleischmann's Yeast today. Eat one cake first thing in the morning, another cake half an hour before supper. Keep this up every day to help keep a good flow of digestive juices.

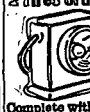
Write for "You Can't Feel Well If Digestive Juices Are Failing". J. F. V. Co., Dept. **H-A**, 695 Washington St., New York. Absolutely FREE!

Copyright, 1940, Standard Brands Incorporated

GUARANTEED TIRES!

FREE! LANTERN

With Every 2 Tires ordered



Complete with batteries and newest type reflector bulb. Ready for instant use. Strong, steady light. Useful everywhere. Order now.

GOODYEAR · GOODRICH FIRESTONE · U.S. and Other Standard Makes

WORLD'S LOWEST TIRE PRICES

Thousands of American customers can vouch for the long, hard service given by our Standard Brand reconditioned tires, serviceably repaired with high-grade materials and rigidly inspected by tire experts before shipping. 24 years' Experience enables us to quote lowest prices with legal agreement to replace at ½ price any tire that fails to give complete satisfaction. Tires returned must be prepaid; prices quoted and replacements fob Chicago

$2.15 30x3½-21

EVERY TIRE GUARANTEED

BALLOON TIRES

Size Rim	Tires	Tubes
29x4.40-21	$2.15	$1.05
29x4.50-20	2.35	1.05
30x4.50-21	2.40	1.15
28x4.75-19	2.45	1.25
29x4.75-20	2.50	1.25
29x5.00-19	2.85	1.25
30x5.00-20	2.85	1.25
6.25-17	2.90	1.35
28x5.25-18	2.90	1.35
29x5.25-19	2.95	1.35
30x5.25-20	2.95	1.35
31x5.25-21	3.25	1.35
5.50-17	3.35	1.40
28x5.50-18	3.35	1.40
29x5.50-19	3.35	1.45
6.00-17	3.40	1.40
30x6.00-18	3.40	1.40
31x6.00-19	3.40	1.45
32x6.00-20	3.45	1.55
33x6.00-21	3.65	1.55
32x6.50-20	3.75	1.75
6.00-16	3.75	1.45

REGULAR CORD TIRES

Size	Tires	Tubes	Size	Tires	Tubes
30x3½	$2.35	$0.95	33x4½	$3.45	$1.45
31x4	2.95	1.25	34x4½	3.45	1.45
32x4	2.95	1.25	30x5	3.65	1.65
33x4	2.95	1.25	32x5	3.75	1.75
34x4	3.25	1.35	33x5	3.95	1.75
32x4½	3.35	1.45	35x5		

HEAVY DUTY TRUCK TIRES

(High Pressure)

Size	Tires	Tubes	Size	Tires	Tubes
30x5	$4.25	$1.95	34x7	$10.95	$4.65
33x5	3.95	1.75	38x7	10.95	4.65
34x5	4.25	2.95	36x8	11.45	4.95
32x6	7.95	2.95	40x8	13.25	4.95
36x6	9.95	4.45			

TRUCK BALLOON TIRES

Size	Tires	Tubes	Size	Tires	Tubes
6.00-20	$3.75	$1.65	7.50-20	$6.95	$3.75
6.50-20	4.45	1.95	8.25-20	8.95	4.95
7.00-20	5.95	2.95	9.00-20	10.95	5.65
			9.75-20	13.95	6.45

ALL OTHER SIZES DEALERS WANTED

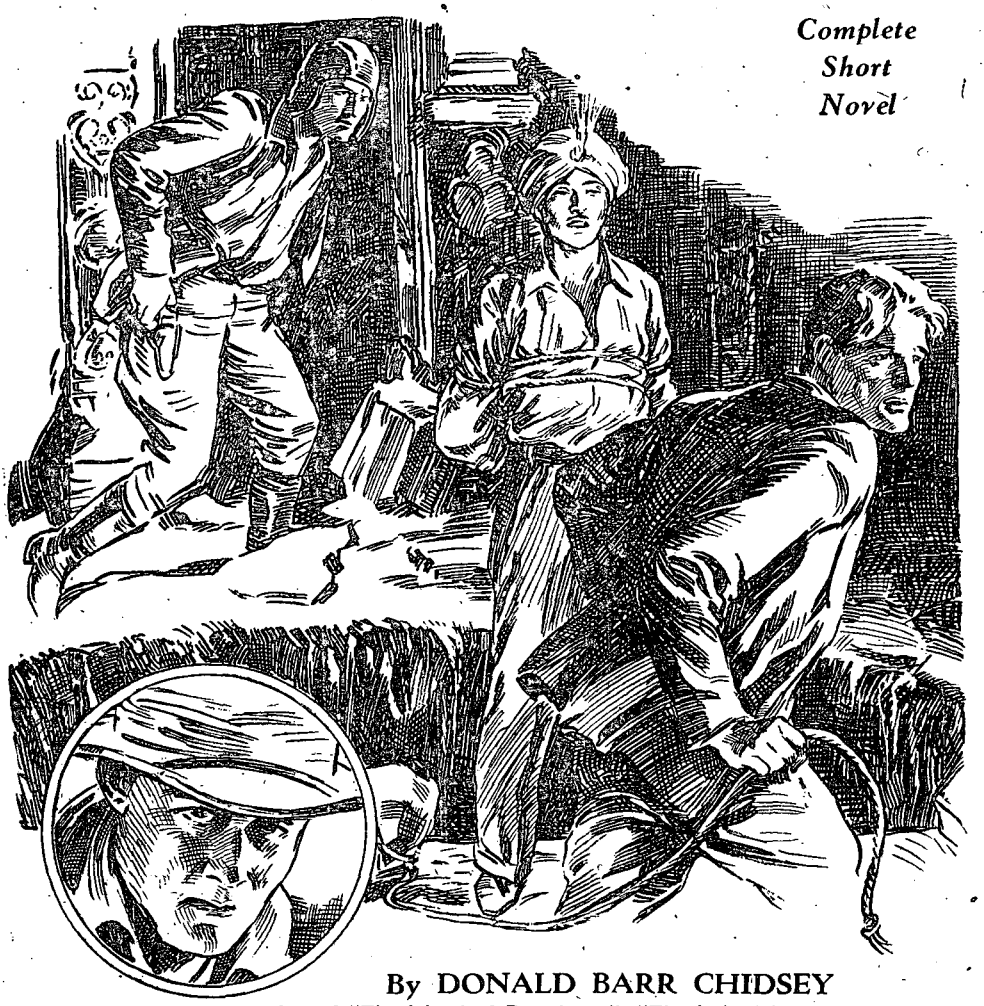
SEND ONLY $1.00 DEPOSIT on each tire ordered. ($3.00 on each Truck Tire.) We ship balance C. O. D. Deduct 5 **per cent** if cash is sent in full with order. To fill order promptly we may substitute brands if necessary. ALL TUBES BRAND NEW—GUARANTEED—

PERRY-FIELD TIRE & RUBBER CO.

2328-30 S. Michigan Av., Dept. 4701-A, Chicago, Ill.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Complete Short Novel



By DONALD BARR CHIDSEY

Author of "The Island of Run Away", "The Lake That Went Mad", etc.

Flight to Singapore

Wisdom is better than rubies, but it's very nice to have both—particularly when you can back them up with guns and a good right arm. Thus sayeth Prince Mike of Kammoriri, who returns by popular demand in this exciting tale of Indo-China

CHAPTER I

THE TRACT AND THE GUN

ARMSTRONG was an Englishman and as hard as steel. He was fiftyish, shy, efficient, a man who had been so baked by tropical suns that everything about him seemed dry, yet who for all this remained wiry and supple.

When we came to the place where we were to part, which was more or less in the middle of nowhere, he simply stopped, touched his topee, stuck out his hand, said: "Well, toodle-oo. See you in Singapore."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Langford fired instantly, his gun sounding like a cannon in that grim temple room. My gun returned his fire; and I saw Kelt whirl

I shook his hand, and repeated, "See you in Singapore."

I'd have been worried about leaving anybody else like that, for he had only two carriers, Burmese boys, personal servants, nice enough but soft; but you couldn't look at Armstrong and worry about him. He was a man who knew how to take care of himself.

So he turned west and I turned east.

It was funny, I thought, plugging along at the head of my boys, how quickly I had learned to take such places for granted.

A few years ago I'd been a cop, a man who almost got seasick on the Oakland ferry, who had never been more than a few miles from San Francisco, and who had never even heard of Kammorirri.

Yet nowadays I wore a sun helmet as if born in it; I commanded an army (such as it was); I played bridge with a crown prince, an engineer, a physician, representing three different complexions; and I thought nothing of walking through hundreds of miles of jungle and mountain land with a fortune strapped around my middle.

It was all because of Mike Lang—His Royal Highness Mikuud-Phni Luangba to you, if you should ever happen to meet him, which is unlikely.

I had got a job working for an insurance company; and they assigned me to bodyguard Mike on his way from Frisco to Honolulu: part of his return trip from Princeton, where he had just finished four

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

years of study, to his ancestral seat in Laos.

Mike was carrying all sorts of jeweled trinkets which my company had insured for a quarter of a million—travel insurance, that is—and I was to see that both prince and gems got to Indo-China safely.

Well, I did; but various things happening on the way, Mike and I had got to be close friends. When we reached Saigon he even wanted me to go back to Kammorirri with him, but I drew the line at that, not seeing how I could possibly be of any use.

He fooled me. He didn't argue; but soon after I got back my firm told me I was to make for Kammorirri. It seems that Mike, whose father is one of the richest men in the world, had been in touch with them by cable from Saigon and had "hired" my services.

Mike was much too good a potential client to be refused anything. I either went—or I was out of a job. Not that I needed much urging.

This is how it happened that a man who had never risen higher than third grade detective in his home town was now in charge of all police and military forces—there weren't any naval forces, this being an Asiatic Switzerland—of the Sultanate of Kammorirri.

It sounds silly; but oddly enough, it worked out. I reorganized the army-police force, such as it was, and taught them to keep step and not to close their eyes when they shot.

There is not much policing to be done in Kammorirri, where the natives generally mind their own business, and their neighbors, being both smart and scattered, leave them alone. There are no cities, only a few villages, besides the capital, which is really nothing but a sprawling palace plopped down in the middle of the jungle.

So what it really amounted to was that I was a sort of captain of the guard. And the real reason why I was there at all—though Mike had sold his father the idea that I was an expert in police organization—was that the prince happened to like me and wanted a fourth hand at bridge. The fact that I couldn't play bridge didn't make any difference to Mike. He taught me.

Every now and then, I would be sent off on a confidential mission like this one.

SO I was thinking along these lines as I walked head down, watching my feet—for this was treacherous country—when I heard an apologetic cough. I looked up—to see a white man.

I wouldn't have got half as big a shock if it had been a three-headed giraffe. I guess it kind of took the breath out of him, too. He was a stocky fellow, youngish, with gold-rimmed glasses and a pink face. He smiled nervously.

"I suppose I ought to say, 'Dr. Livingstone, I presume'?"

"Well, if that's who you're looking for, you've got the wrong guy," I told him. "The only medico for hundreds of miles around, so far as I know, is the one at the palace, and he's a Siamese named Foffokek or something."

"Still, it is strange. Meeting like this."

"It certainly is!"

He nodded, not looking at me. He wore an enormous topee and was several inches thorter than I am, so that I could not see much of his face. It occurred to me that the boys with me were nothing, after all, but carriers, unarmed servants.

And what was this guy doing out here? Kammorirri isn't like any other country. It doesn't encourage visitors. In fact, it kicks them out when ever it catches sight of one.

Now I thought I saw this man's muscles tighten under his shirt. He edged a little closer. Then his right hand streaked to his hip pocket.

I had half drawn, I could have punctured him easily, when I saw what it was he was pulling out of his pocket. Feeling foolish, I shoved my revolver back into its holster. Fortunately he hadn't seen it.

"Brother," he said, "I wonder if you have given a thought to your soul lately?"

"Brother," I answered, taking the tract

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

just to be polite, "I wonder if you've given a thought to your skin? The Sultan of this land is a testy old party, and if there are two things he hates more than anything else it's airplanes and missionaries."

"I am seeking out Kammorirri," he said, "in the hope of persuading his highness to change his mind."

You've got a hot chance, I thought, but didn't say anything.

"If you're going there, may I go with you?"

"Why not?"

It was my duty to place him under arrest anyway, for not being equipped with the proper papers—you have to get the Sultan's permission even to enter Kammorirri—but I didn't tell him this.

THE fact is, I was still feeling sheepish about the way I'd reached for my gun. What was getting into me, anyway?

My eight carriers I assumed were staring at me, from behind; but at the same time a goofiness I can't describe was tugging at my nerves with a warning that I was being stared at from another angle —from the jungle.

That couldn't be, of course. Just the same, I had a hard time keeping myself from casting nervous glances into that jungle.

"If you know the Sultan personally—"

"I've never even seen him."

He lifted his head and there was amazement in his eyes.

"But you've been out here for more than a year and yet—"

"How do you know I've been out here for more than a year?"

"You're George Marlin, aren't you?"

I nodded, amazed myself now. The man gave a pleasant smile.

"Maybe you didn't realize you were famous?"

"I didn't," I admitted. "Well anyway, I actually never have seen his highness. He's an old man, and the palace is a big place."

I motioned ahead. There was no path or trail. We were going down the side of a mountain.

"Let's get moving. As soon as we hit a level space we'll stop for tiffin and a little talk, eh?"

He led the way without another word, and I kept close behind him, and I could hear the carriers behind me. The carriers were moving fast now: there was not much left to carry.

I got to wondering, as we walked, about missionaries. You meet them everywhere. Their very helplessness seems somehow to get them through.

This guy, for instance. Apparently he had nothing but a knapsack, no rifle, no carriers, no tent, perhaps not even a mosquito net. And here he was wandering around in one of the wildest parts of the world without, probably, even a compass. He faced the upper Kammorirrian jungle with a toothbrush, a smile and a bundle of religious tracts.

What can you do about a guy like that? If he hadn't happened to run into me, I thought, he might have wandered until he dropped dead.

But I still had that nerve-jerkiness about unseen eyes. And I fell to wondering whether this guy in front of me was really as innocent as he looked. I'm a cop, after all, and it's part of my training to be suspicious of people.

So when this guy was climbing down a particularly nasty ledge and obliged to devote all his attention to his feet, I leaned over and felt of his knapsack. And what I felt the outline of, made me give a dirty little grin and loosen the revolver.

There were two rifles behind me; but the revolver, which I carried chiefly in case of snakes, would be best.

When we reached the foot of the mountain we paused, panting, and I gave the signal to prepare lunch.

"You've come a long way looking for converts."

"To carry the Word," he replied, wiping his face with a handkerchief, "is its own reward."

"The people around here have got a religion already that's satisfied them for hundreds of years."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Granted. But our duty to spread the Word is not lessened because of that. The Sultan surely will not refuse me admittance. For I bring the greatest of all riches. Are you perhaps familiar with the tenth verse of the eighth chapter of Proverbs, which says, 'Receive my instruction, and not silver; and knowledge rather than choice gold'?"

"Sure," I came back, "and the next verse goes, 'For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared unto her'."

WELL, we'd been handing one another surprises, but this beat them all. It must have been pretty astonishing in the first place to hear a guy like me quote Scripture. I'd better explain.

You see, there was not much reading matter at the Kammorirri palace. Not much that I could read, at least. The only books in English, believe it or not, were the Bible, Culbertson's *Red Book on Leads and Plays,* Evangeline Adams' *Astrology for Everybody,* and a thin volume entitled *What Every Expectant Mother Should Know.*

As anybody who has read all four of these works will assure you, the Bible is far-and-away the most entertaining. And in the Bible my favorite book, after Job, was Proverbs. Which is the reason why I was able to cap that quotation so promptly.

What was even more significant was the fact that my companion's eyes registered fear when I spoke the word "rubies." It was *then* that he knew I was wise to him.

"While we're on the subject," I added, "maybe it would be better to take that automatic out of your knapsack. Even missionaries—"

He moved fast. He must have rehearsed the business many times. His right hand flew up over his right shoulder, slapped back the unfastened top of the knapsack and grasped the automatic almost as swiftly as it might have done if that automatic had been in a holster hanging from his belt, like my revolver.

Almost as swiftly. I still had time to raise my own gun and sight it instead of shooting from the hip. I might have spoiled his face if I'd shot from the hip. As it was, the bullet clanged against the automatic just as it was coming over the shoulder.

It must have given his hand a terrific shock. He staggered back, screeching in pain, and naturally he dropped the gun.

What happened after that was my own fault. I should have been ready for it. I should have let my hunch warn me.

There was a sharp crack somewhere in the jungle on the left, and the loose of my shirt lifted away from me and then fell back. Literally, I swear, I felt the wind of that slug against my chest.

There was another crack; but I didn't feel any wind that time, being too busy getting to the ground.

My carriers went down at the same instant, like a batch of bowling pins, and the self-styled missionary, who still had his tracts but no longer had his gun, scuttled out of sight.

Then silence. It was a silence that didn't ring in my ears but instead pressed soggily against them. There were no echoes of the shots. The damp heavy jungle gulped all sound.

I lay perfectly still for maybe three minutes. Then I wriggled around to get a look at the carriers. They were flat, and scared. After all they were not soldiers or policemen. They couldn't be expected to behave well.

The silence, too, was getting them. Under a barrage of gunfire they might have been simply scared stiff; but in that horrible silence they were likely to give way to panic, to spring to their feet and dash in all directions.

They were looking at me. I had to do something.

Well, of course! I couldn't lie like this all day. There were at least two men in the jungle with at least one rifle. They might be far away by this time. Or they might be close at hand.

I scooped up the "missionary's" automatic. The two nearest carriers had my rifles, one a heavy elephant gun, the other

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a light piece I'd brought along primarily for potshots at birds. I decided that the pistols would be more convenient. I nodded and made an encouraging sign, and then very carefully I slipped into the jungle.

I won't go into details about that search, which lasted more than an hour. It was nerve-racking, for I expected to be shot in the back at any moment; but it was fruitless.

The only thing in the least out of the way I found was a triangular shred of brown gabardine which a spiky creeper had torn off something, probably off somebody's shirt or shorts. It was good gabardine, too.

When at last I returned to the carriers they were quieter. They were eager to get going, and so was I. A pistol in each hand, I took the rear of the column this time, not the head.

Every now and then, more by instinct than purpose, I would put a hand against my money belt and feel the outline of what was there. "For wisdom is better than rubies . . ." Well, I couldn't help wishing I had the wisdom too.

Late the next afternoon we filed along the one and only street of Kammorirri, a straggle of nipa-thatched huts, and through the main gates of the palace.

CHAPTER II

RUBY COME, RUBY GO

THE palace at Kammorirri did not strike you with its size at first look, for it was strewn all over that part of the country. Only when you got mooching around, and had been lost fourteen or fifeen times, did you realize what a big place it was.

In the huge court just inside the main gates we encircled a gun. It was not an ornamental cannon. It was a workable piece of artillery, attended day and night by a trained crew. It was, in fact, one of the few strictly modern articles in all Kammorirri—a large and terrifying anti-aircraft gun.

The Sultan had made it perfectly clear, some years ago, that any airplane flying over his domains for any reason whatever did so at its own risk. And the Sultan of Kammorirri was a man who meant what he said. With dozens of generations of warrior kings behind him, he was, by any definition, a tough guy.

Some large imperial European power could have overrun Kammorirri and "civilized" it in the name of humanity and so forth; but the job would have taken a lot of time and men and money, for there were no roads in mountainous Kammorirri, no cities and precious few villages to bomb, no level spaces.

Besides, where would be the profit? The Sultan himself was fabulously rich, but the country was poor, producing nothing. The Sultan was rich because his ancestors had taken tribute from surrounding tribes, and also because of the ruby mines.

But the ruby mines were long since worked out. They'd been abandoned even before the coming of the Westerners. So the Westerners graciously permitted Kammorirri to remain independent.

The Sultan hated those fellows. All around him he had seen brother potentates, many of them his cousins, either squelched or gelded by gobbling European powers. But he remained an honest-to-goodness ruler, not a mere set-up like the Emperor of Annam, the King of Cambodia, the sultans of the various Malay states, federated and unfederated, with their white "advisors."

For a long while he even resisted pressure to have his oldest son educated in a western university, and he never consented to send Mikuud-Phni Luangba to Paris or Oxford, as he was urged to do, but compromised on Princeton.

"No planes," said the Sultan, and erected an anti-aircraft gun in his front yard. He made a single exception. It was difficult for him to refuse anything to Mike; and flying, a sport Mike had picked up in the States, was exactly the sort of thing the kid loved.

Mike's little silver monoplane, specially built for him at a cost of almost half a million dolars, was not to be fired upon.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mike hangared it right in the palace grounds, and landed and took off from a courtyard much too small.

Mike enjoyed that. There was nothing he loved so much as risking his neck.

. . . Back from this trip, I was able to see him at once.

"Ah, my Georgie! It is good to have you back. You did not bring Armstrong?"

I shook my head.

"He's making for Mandalay, and from there he's going to take the river boat down to Rangoon and catch a P. and O. ship. Business. We'll meet him in Singapore."

Mike was twenty-five and looked seventeen. He wasn't any taller than five feet. He was neat, trig, even dainty, though not greasily slick. He sported a tiny black mustache: otherwise you might have taken him for a girl.

But don't make the mistake of thinking that Mikuud-Phni Luangba was any sissy. I've seen him in fights. For all his fastidiousness and his gay good humor—I don't think I ever saw him really get sore at anything—he was his father's son. More than one fool who got too flip with Mike picked himself up from the floor afterward wondering whether he was ever going to be able to chew anything again.

With it all, he was just about the most likable little chap you ever met, crown prince or no crown prince. I'd have done anything in the world for Mike. He was the one person who made that great gloomy palace bearable.

He didn't like the palace any more than I did. But he knew his duty. He'd had his fling; and now he was settling down to the business of getting ready to be Sultan when his old man died. Even so, it wasn't easy.

We used to slip away now and then in that dashing silver monoplane, and blow ourselves to a party in Bangkok or Singapore or Pnom-Penh or, more often, because it was the gayest, the little Paris of the East, Saigon.

In an audience chamber or council chamber, his robes of state on him, surrounded by scowling dark priests, Mikuud-Phni Luangba could be as dignified as the best of them; but you ought to see Mike Lang when he broke loose!

"Then your little expedition was a failure?" he asked, and seemed genuinely pleased.

"That's what *you* think!" I unfastened the money belt and tipped it up so that its contents clanged upon the table. "Give a glance at these! And Armstrong has just as many."

NOW it happens that I know something about precious stones. Not that I ever expect to own one; but when I got out of the cops it was to go with the Jewelers' Protective Association as a special investigator, and in order to do that I first had to take a course in gemmery.

A little later, when I went with the Great Western people, who specialize in insuring jewelry, this knowledge came in handy. And I hadn't forgotten any of it.

Especially I know rubies. What I hadn't known about them before going to Kammorirri I learned there; for the old Sultan's wealth consisted not of stocks and bonds and mortgages and such-like pieces of paper, for which he had no use, but of rubies and emeralds and diamonds and sapphires.

Rubies most of all. The palace fairly dripped with them. Every single one belonged to the Sultan himself, with the exception of maybe a few million dollars' worth he'd given to Mike from time to time.

These rubies I had brought back to show Mike were honeys. Uncut, of course, just the way Armstrong and I had prised them out of crystalline limestone; but it did not need an expert to see that they were pure flawless pigeon-bloods.

Not spinels, not Adelaide rubies (which are nothing really but almandine garnets), nor Brazilians (a fancy name for dark red topaz), and not the wine-colored tourmalines they call rubellite.

No, these were *rubies!* Nothing lovelier ever came out of Mogok or Kabul. Every one of them held that suggestion of purple

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

which makes the connoisseur get a dreamy expression in his eyes.

Mike fingered them, and his mouth was sad. I don't suppose any man ever loved rubies more than Mike. It was in his blood.

Besides, this find meant that the rumors which had been drifting into the palace for some time, vaguely, from goodness knows where—rumors of untouched veins of rubies in upper Kammorirri—were true.

I had been sent out with the engineer Armstrong to check those rumors. My report, now, meant that the Sultan, already a very rich man, soon would be infinitely richer. For everything in Kammorirri belonged to him, and would belong to Mike when he died.

Nevertheless Mike was sad. I knew how he felt. Even in an obscure little mountain sultanate like this, you could keep a secret only so long. Sooner or later the outside world was going to find out about those new unworked ruby mines; and then all the laws and all the cops in the world weren't going to keep out treasure hunters.

Treasure hunters—it sounds romantic. As a matter of fact, they would be the restless misfits of the East, men of every race and complexion, scoundrels, fools, cutthroats, crooked promoters; all scrambling after quick money, ready to risk anything, to cheat or kill anybody, to break any laws, in fact to do anything at all except really work, in order to get rich.

It would mean, that is, the end of the old Kammorirri. Which might have been all to the good. It depends on how you look at it. The point was that the Sultan did not want the old Kammorirri to be changed; and what the Sultan wanted, Mike, regardless of his personal feelings, worked for.

Mike looked up at me, shaking his head.

"This means we will have the 'business men' here soon."

"Maybe we've got them already." I told him about what had happened the previous day. "I hope they didn't get Armstrong," I finished. "I like that guy."

Mike put a hand on my arm.

"I will go to my father. I will tell him there is but one thing to be done, and that is to give a certain reliable syndicate full rights to the new mines: on our own terms, of course, and with the provision that those rights should not be exercised until we grant permission.

"I know the men back of that syndicate, Englishmen mostly. I know they can be trusted, and my father knows this. In many ways they are more powerful than we are. With so many important millionaires having an exclusive interest in the new mines, nobody else will dare approach them.

"And no rubies will be taken out, no machinery brought in, for a long while yet—at least for the lifetime of my father. The business men will be willing to wait. They are sensible. They know that to work these mines now would bring the price of rubies down too far."

"That's all very well," I said, "but can you get your old— Can you persuade his highness to agree? To treat with foreigners—"

"He'll agree. He'll have to. Wait here."

I waited a long while. Presently I heard voices raised in the next room. There was Mike's voice, low, firm, dulcet, and a loud harsh angry voice.

They were talking in Siamese, so that I could not understand; but there was no mistaking the tones. Only one man in this part of the world would dare to shout that way to Mikuud-Phni Luangba; and it gave me a kind of funny feeling to know that I was so close to that cantankerous and marvelous old despot I'd never even seen.

After a while Mike came back. He wore, as he had worn before, yellow espadrilles, strawberry sailcloth slacks, a giddy yellow cotton sport shirt, and a white turban set with a huge ruby aigrette.

Though the turban was the only Eastern thing about his clothes, in appearance, now, he was all Oriental. There was no expression on his face.

He scooped up the rubies, gazed lovingly at them a moment, then put them back into the money belt. He turned to me.

"Please give the order to have the plane

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wheeled out. We take off now, you and I, for Singapore."

WE SPENT that night in Bangkok. Mike, because he thought the pleasant monotonous jogging would rest his nerves, made the mistake of taking a ricksha instead of a taxi for the long jaunt in from the airport; and of course he was seen, recognized, and invited to dinner.

It happened to be a cousin he couldn't refuse; so I ate alone at the hotel.

Afterward I sat at a window in my room, which looked out over a terrace and over the Menam, and had a leisurely whisky-soda. Mike, I knew, was somewhere drinking champagne; but I was glad to be where I was, and quiet. We were to take off at dawn.

Fading sunlight hung over the river, but the room behind me was dark. When I heard somebody moving around I did not turn my head.

In the East it's different. In the East there are so many men, or "boys," working everywhere, that a guy gets used to having three or four around. They glide in and out at all hours: not only the servants assigned to wait on you personally, some of whom you probably haven't even seen before, but also their assistants, and *their* assistants.

So I didn't turn my head when I heard somebody moving around in the room. I simply took it for granted that the third deputy washbasin coolie had been sent in to salvage a sliver of soap for the second deputy washbasin coolie—or something like that. The fact that he did not show a light and made scarcely a sound, didn't count. No good room boy does.

It was not until I decided to have another highball and found that the bellpush was out of reach that I turned and called. You never get out of your chair for anything in the East.

"Boy! Ketchum-up whisky-soda!"

I heard a gasp, a click of metal, and realized that he wasn't a "boy" at all. It was too late. He had already started to shoot.

He must have been high-strung to let fly like that. I suppose I gave him a terrible start. You see, though I was seated at the window and looking out over the river, I was more or less in shadow and from where he happened to be he couldn't see me. The very light from the window itself, such as it was, would have made the shadows around me all the darker.

So when my voice came out of nowhere, he did not even stop long enough to listen to the words. He just went blooey, thinking, I suppose, that he was caught in a police trap.

Which argues a bad conscience. And also a lack of experience in burglarizing.

As far as I was concerned, I got every bit as much of a shock myself. But the darkness saved me. The guy must have aimed at the sound of my voice, and either I was unconsciously something of a ventriloquist or else he was a lousy shot. Anyway I heard the gun roar, but I never felt a thing.

I didn't wait for my luck to keep holding out. I dived for where I believed the foot of the bed to be. It wasn't very dignified in a commissioner of police who was supposed to be hard-boiled; but there wasn't anybody to tell about it afterward.

I heard another shot, and then I heard him run into the hall.

I scrambled out, snapped on the light, found my own gun—and reached the door just as it was opened by a couple of goggling roomboys backed by one of the assistant managers.

"Sorry," I said, waggling the gun. "I was cleaning it and it went off by accident."

The assistant manager knew who I was, and who Mike was, though we were registered under different names. He knew that it was all right for me to have a gun. He also knew, I suppose, that Mike didn't care for publicity. For that matter, neither did I.

So he smiled, though it took some doing, and begged my pardon, and told the boys to come away. And I shut the door.

Mike surprised me, when he came back

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

late that night, by refusing to take the affair seriously. As a matter of fact, I think he'd had too much champagne, though he wouldn't admit it.

"Some prowler," was the way he diagnosed it.

I showed him one of the slugs which instead of going into me had gone into the wall next to the window.

"Six right-hand grooves with a sharp twist. And look at these." I chucked two cartridge casings on the table. "I found these several feet in front of where he must have stood. Which means a Webley .455 self-loader. Would a prowler tote a gat like that?"

Mike shrugged, and started to undress.

"Stole it somewhere, no doubt. They are very careless about guns here. They do not have so excellent a policeman as you."

"Just the same," I insisted, "there's somebody out after these rubies. Somebody who's no ordinary crook."

"Let's go to sleep," suggested Mike.

But I was right. As we found out the next day.

MIKE'S little ship thought nothing of hitting up 250 m.p.h. the whole length of the Malay Peninsula. It was just getting warmed up when we put down at Penang, a bright green-and-white island in a bright blue Indian Ocean, for gas, water and ice.

For we had an ice box. I keep calling this ship "little," maybe just because it belonged to Mike and everything connected with Mike seemed little; maybe because the controls were fitted to him, so that I had to do some squodgy leg-bending in order to handle her; maybe because, being so fast, she did not have much wing spread.

Really she was a fair-sized crate. We had a very swank little washroom, a regulatable lounge chair, a galley, even an ice box. You couldn't have put on a seven-course dinner, but you could get yourself sandwiches and something hot or cold to drink.

Mike was a trifle hangoverish this day, which is why he wanted to fill the ice box in Penang.

After he had taken her up again, I took over and gave him a chance to snooze in the lounge chair. I'm no pilot, but Mike had taught me enough to hold onto the controls in calm weather.

After a while I heard Mike get up, yawning. He looked out.

"Must be getting near Kuala Lumpur. I'll take her, Georgie. Thanks."

I slid away from the controls, saying, "Have a good sleep?" and started for the washroom, which was an idea I'd had for some time.

The door was opened before I could reach it, from the other side. A man stood there. He was tallish and maybe thirty-five, very pale, blond, and looked tough.

I don't mean that last in the gutter sense. He did not look as though he'd ever lived in a tenement, talked out of a corner of his mouth, patronized a pool parlor or been arraigned before a police magistrate on a charge of misusing a blackjack.

No, he looked educated, smart, but at the same time he looked as if he knew what he wanted and was going to get it. A bad actor, in other words.

This was not the first time I'd faced a gun, but I don't remember ever before feeling as sinky inside as I did when that man opened the door of the washroom.

Or perhaps I forgot to mention that he held a gun? It was a Webley .455 caliber automatic.

"Hello," I said. "You missed me last night, didn't you?"

"I'm not likely to miss you now."

Mike, without turning, called, "Did you speak to me, Georgie?"

"No, I spoke to the visitor, your highness." I always called Mike that in front of other people. "You didn't know we had a visitor, did you?"

Mike turned, and his little dark eyes got bright with astonishment rather than with fear. He *o*-ed his mouth. He shook his head. Then he spoke sternly, as if to a naughty child.

"Don't be silly. You can't perform a stick-up on a plane."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I'm doing it," the man pointed out.

"If I were to throw this into a nose dive, you'd be killed."

"So would you."

He stepped clear out of the washroom and moved the barrel of the gun a little so that it pointed toward Mike. That frightened me. I always get frightened when Mike is in danger, which is pretty often.

"Listen," I snapped, "if anything happened to him I could no more land a plane without cracking it up than I could swim across the ocean."

The man paid no attention. His eyes flicked to the right for just an instant and after that were perfectly steady, looking, somehow, at both Mike and me at the same time.

"Turn around," he said to me.

I turned, staring through a window at the earth below, and he took away my gun. He chucked this carelessly on the floor. He unfastened my money belt.

Did I move? Unh-unh! I hated to lose several hundred thousand dollars' worth of gems belonging to Mike's old man, but I would have hated even more to lose my life.

"Take her down," I heard the man say, "into that field over there."

"Sorry. I can't be putting planes down in strange fields," said His Royal Highness Mikuud-Phni Luangba, who used to make a hundred hearts skip every time he landed this crate in the courtyard of his father's palace and who would have tried to use the roof of an automobile for an airport if he'd been bet enough.

"There's plenty of room, there's practically no wind, and the place is just as smooth as it looks from here. Take her down."

Mike evidently decided, like me, that there was no use getting shot in the back at this stage of the game. I felt us losing altitude.

I said, "You know the neighborhood, eh? I'll remember that."

There was no answer. Mike made a beautiful landing. Even though I was not leaning against anything, I didn't stagger. The field, as the guy had said, was as smooth as it looked. What's more, it was hard as concrete, which was unusual anywhere in Selangor, F.M.S. We rolled to a stop.

"You will now go where I just came from," directed the guy. "I mean both of you."

I thought for a moment that it couldn't be done. I stand six feet two and one-half and when I get down to two hundred and twenty pounds people say I'm looking skinny. That washroom wasn't much bigger than a telephone booth, and not nearly as high.

Fortunately the crown prince of Kammorirri, as I think I've mentioned, is no giant. We did it somehow. And the door was closed.

"Stay there," a loud voice said, "for five minutes."

Well, if we had, one of us—probably me—would have cracked. Anyway, getting shot from in front didn't seem as terrible as getting shot from behind. And he might be able to wing only one of us.

Mike, when he could draw in enough breath, whispered, "Do we leave, Georgie?"

I muttered, "Why not? I've got a hand on the doorknob."

I couldn't possibly have put that hand anywhere else.

"When I count three," whispered Mike. "One—"

"Beat hell out of him if he gets me first," I whispered.

"You beat hell out of him if he gets *me* first! Two—"

"I'll do more than that," I promised. "I'll kill him."

"Three!"

I turned the knob and we both pushed—and we stayed right there where we were, feeling foolish. We'd been all keyed up to face a blasting gun, and we hadn't moved an inch. The door was jammed.

We could not believe it, at first. The door had no lock on the outside, as we both knew. Then we got wise. It was the big lounge chair which our friend had somehow soundlessly moved to the door.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I'll say this for him: He made a better stick-up man than burglar.

I gave a terrific push, shoving my muscles out in all diretcions. The chair outside gave way, the door gave way, and Mike and I tumbled at last into the main part of the cabin.

Nobody else was there. Mike went to a window, while I scooped up my gun. I was amazed to find it still there—and loaded!

"There he goes!"

THE man was running, and running hard, his brown coat flapping behind him. A group of field coolies, half naked Teochius, were pointing to him and chattering like monkeys. He had to pass near them, and as he did so he threw something away.

"I hope, for his sake," I cried, pushing open the door of the plane, "that that wasn't his gun."

He was gone when I got outside, but he couldn't be far away. He was long-legged, but so am I. I sprinted past the coolies and found myself rather suddenly out of the field and in a nice cool shady private road. There came from somewhere ahead the roar of an engine. I ran in that direction.

The house too, though it was a large sprawling one, appeared with dramatic suddenness. Just another Englishman, I thought, who builds his gardens wherever he goes. Only in this case the quaint English garden had waxed emphatically tropical, which was only natural, so that you could hardly catch a glimpse of the house itself until you were almost on top of it.

To the right was a small garage, and as I came pelting up what must have been the main driveway, a car hurtled out of this building, its engine making a lot of noise. They may be able to construct swell gardens, the English, but when it comes to cars they're not so good. I saw Brown Coat at the wheel of this one, and I raised my gun, shouting.

He came right at me. I had a chance for only one shot, and I shouldn't have risked even that. The car was rocking from side to side. A hit would have been sheer luck.

Then I jumped, the car missing me by inches. I started to swerve, my gun still raised, when something in the house roared even above the roaring of the engine. Gravel just in front of me leaped into the air, while pellets slished past my shoes and the bottoms of my pants, clipping leaves from the hibiscus bushes behind me.

"What the devil is this, sir?"

The car was gone. In a window of the house stood a man with a lovely white mustache and the biggest shotgun I've ever seen. There was smoke wandering out of one barrel of that shotgun.

I yelled, "A man just stole your car!"

"Put that pistol away or I'll give you the other barrel!"

I put the pistol away, but I yelled, "Who was that man?"

"Never saw him before in my life. Who are *you?*"

"How did he knew you had a car here? How did he know the ignition key was going to be left in it? What was he doing—"

"Dammit, sir!" The shotgun went up again. "This is *my* home and *I'm* asking the questions!"

Mike came panting up then, and we explained and introduced one another all around, though it was quite a while—and you can't blame him—before our shotgun friend, whose name turned out to be Leslie Kettenish, could get any idea of what it was all about.

"I'll have the blighter arrested!"

"So will we, if we ever clap eyes on him again."

"Dammit, he used my son's landing field as if it were a public airport!"

"How did he know it was a landing field?" I asked quickly.

"How the devil should I know that, sir? You come here—"

Then we were surrounded by coolies, one of whom, jabbering something I couldn't understand, held my money belt.

"Threw it away empty, to try to divert us," Mike panted.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But I saw that the thing was heavy. I took it from the Chink and opened it. It was full of rubies.

CHAPTER III

SOGO STREET BLUES

BUSINESS men, they say, are the same the whole world over. They might not look alike or talk alike; but whether he's a Frenchie, Yank, Jap or what, you'll see in his eyes that same icy glint when you're trying to sell him something.

Now take those Englishmen—

There were five of them, sitting around a table big enough for twenty-five, and they were just about the chilliest set of dickerers I've ever seen. Immaculate, faultless in appearance; when they spoke at all it was in low polite voices. Nevertheless each one of them had that look in his eyes.

One was a native of Singapore. The other four were visitors making a trip through the East to inspect their holdings. And don't think those holdings weren't big. Though there wasn't a title among these men, not ever a "sir," they were five of the richest alive. It would have been extraordinary even in London for them to be all seated around the same table at the same time; in Singapore it was without precedent.

"Your highness of course is a celebrated connoisseur, and I am sure that none of us would dream of questioning your judgment. At the same time—"

"At the same time," Mike interrupted, all smiles, "you would like to see the evidence. Don't you think I have provided it? Do you think I would ask you to take the mere word of a descendant of the Khmeer emperors, when money is involved?"

He didn't like them, and they knew it, though they were much too clever to let this knowledge show. They had plenty of respect for Mike; not just for his position—what were princes to these princes of finance?—but for his ability.

It made me feel pretty proud of Mike. For all the kid's wildness, for all his habit of getting into jams, and his fondness for champagne, he was no fool, Mikuud-Phni Luangba!

There he sat as slim and sweet as a girl—yet he was as cool as when at home he'd bring a tiger down or stand untwitching to the charge of an infuriated elephant. It wasn't for nothing that his old man had entrusted him with this incalculably important business errand. Mike was not losing a trick.

"And then, there is the matter of Armstrong—"

There certainly was the matter of Armstrong. What had happened to him? Armstrong was not only a nice guy personally: he also was one of the greatest mining engineers England ever sent out. He knew his rubies. Moreover his reputation for integrity was such that nobody, not even these glass-eyed tyrants, could have questioned his word.

Mike and I had arrived in Singapore two days ago; and while Mike had made his arrangements for this meeting—not all of the five men were in the city at the time—I had set about trying to pump some sense out of what had happened on the way.

It had not taken long to learn that my suspicions of Leslie Kettenish were so much air. Kettenish was all he'd said he was; and his son, a rubber broker in Singapore, did have a private plane. I saw young Kettenish, but he couldn't help me.

I sent wires to two men in Mandalay and another in Rangoon, and got answers from all three saying that they had not seen Armstrong. The P. and O. people had no reservation in his name.

I checked on planes and learned nothing—except that the officials of the Straits Settlements were even more jumpy about their famous naval base than I'd supposed: my questions got them asking *me* questions, and I was almost pinched for a spy.

I tried most of all to find the man in the brown coat. And it was for this reason that at last, reluctantly, I had gone to the cops.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A GUY like Mike, for all the fact the Kammorirri was nobody's protectorate, ordinarily had no chance whatever of getting into Singapore without having a "guard of honor" slapped on him by the jittery British. On this visit, for two days, we had somehow, so far, remained incog. But this was all spoiled when I went to the cops.

Nor was the information I received worth it. Nobody seemed to know who Brown Coat was, from my description, and I could not pick his picture nor that of the "missionary" out of the local rogues' gallery.

There was only one person who might conceivably help me: a half-Chinese informer named Yang, who however seemed to have disappeared. Yang, the cops declared, liked his pipe. They were watching all opium joints, legal and illegal, and would let me know if they found any trace of the man. They wanted him themselves, for other reasons.

Yang, they told me, knew every bad white man who had lived in Singapore in the past eight years; and he never forgot. Moreover, you could get him to talk. You can always, of course, get any dopey to talk.

Kettenish's car we'd found abandoned in Kuala Lumpur near the Metropole Hotel, which is right across from the railway station. Nobody at the hotel remembered Brown Coat, but the railway booking clerk seemed to remember having sold a ticket to somebody answering that description.

He would have just about had time to jump the train south; and when Mike and I took off again in Mike's plane from Kettenish's field we were confident that we would be in the Singapore terminal ready to pick him up when that train pulled in.

Well, we were—but we didn't see anything of Brown Coat. Now that I'd got the cops on the job we were checking way stations along the line; but we did not seem to be getting far.

. . . "And your highness' rubies?" The guy at the head of the table swerved solemn respectful eyes upon Mike. "Would it be asking too much—"

"Certainly not." Mike turned to me. "Show them, Georgie!"

I opened the money belt and tumbled its contents upon the table. There were twenty-two large stones. Armstrong, wherever he was, had an equal number.

Mike sat smiling, confident. He was asking these men to consent to some pretty stiff terms, but he was sure of his merchandise. I was smiling too. In fact we looked at one another and grinned like a couple of proud kids.

Each of the five men, one using a loupe, examined each of them twenty-two stones with care. They were wooden-faced, as always, and did not look up. They're afraid to look up, I gloated to myself. They're afraid we'll see the gleam in their eyes.

After a long while, though, I began to get worried. This procedure wasn't natural; it wasn't even human. How could anybody, even an Englishman, look at stones like that and keep excitement from his face? I didn't like it. And I saw that Mike too was troubled.

Each of the five looked at each of the others, and each gave the slightest possible nod. The one at the head of the table, after clearing his voice, said cautiously to Mike:

"Are you quite sure that your highness hasn't—uh— Shall I put it this way: that perhaps in your highness's eagerness—"

Mike went American on him. It was not for nothing that Mike had spent four years at Princeton.

"What the hell are you getting at?" He slammed a fist upon the table. "You're certainly not going to try to deny that these are the finest pigeon's-bloods you ever laid eyes on?"

They cleared their throats very softly, as if it were a rite, and they looked, if they could be said to look anything, embarrassed. The one at the head of the table leaned a trifle closer to Mike. His manner was not exactly patronizing, but it was something dangerously close to that.

"Your highness understands, of course,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that we could not for an instant impugn his judgment in matters of precious stones. But isn't it just barely possible—"

The nabob, having seen Mike's eyes, stopped. I guess he was scared. He had reason to be.

Mike picked up one of the stones. He looked at it, and began to frown. He picked up another.

THIS was too sacred a table for me to be seated at, of course; but I was standing right behind one of the big shots, and I reached over his shoulder and took the loupe out of his hand and picked up a bunch of stones. The fact that he probably owned more street car systems than I did shirts didn't make any difference to me.

Before we were satisfied, Mike and I had gone back and forth to the window a dozen times. Below, in Raffles Square, three or four plainclothesmen loafed, now and then glancing up at these windows, and there were no doubt about plainclothesmen in the hall; but we had no thought for these.

At last Mike looked up. I almost thought he was going to cry.

"Georgie, are you certain that—"

"Mike," I said, forgetting to highness him, "I swear they haven't been out of my belt and the belt hasn't been from around my waist since we left Kettenish's three days ago. I've slept in it."

"Then it must have been that—"

The idea came to me at last. I don't see how I could possibly have taken so long thinking of it. I grabbed Mike's shoulder.

"Listen. That guy in the plane. He wore a brown coat—he was facing you most of the time—did you happen to notice whether a small triangle of cloth was torn out of the coat anywhere?"

Mike nodded.

"As a matter of fact, I did. I examined him carefully because I wanted to be able to give a good description afterward. There was such a piece torn out just underneath the right pocket."

"Like this?" I pulled out the scrap of brown gabardine I'd picked up in upper Kammorirri. I'd forgotten all about it until just now.

Mike nodded.

"That could be the very piece. Why?"

"Why, because that means he flew down. *Flew*, understand? From somewhere near the neighborhood of those mines. He must have climbed aboard your plane either at Bangkok or Penang, and how could he have beaten me to either place if he didn't have a plane of his own?

"Even if he went direct to Aranya Pradesa or the railhead above Lopburi he couldn't possibly have made a connection to get him to Bangkok by the time we took off, much less the night before. Don't you see?

"What's more, he wasn't scared when I pointed out that if he shot you I couldn't land the plane. And how did he know about Kettenish's private landing field—it isn't near the railroad or any highway—except from flying over it? He's a pilot himself. That's the answer."

"But— But why should he change—" Mike waved toward the stones on the table. "Those are only spinels. *Good* ones, yes, and just about the same size—"

"Of course they are! He didn't want to steal the stones we had as much as he wanted to switch these for them, so that we'd think later that we'd made a mistake. That's probably what his pal the phoney missionary planned to do, only I got wise to him. You see what it means, don't you? It means they're afraid of being interrupted up there."

"Up where?"

"Up where Armstrong and I went on that expedition. There must be some place near those mines where you can land and take off. Come on!"

As we started out, one of the stiff-necks cried, "But see heah! Doesn't his highness want these—"

"Those?" I said, wheeling. "They wouldn't be used to pave the winecellars with in Kammorirri! But stick around. We'll get you some real ones."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Just outside the door a police detective named Carse came up and told us that they thought they had located Yang, the informer. Carse said:

"It appears that Yang is in a place over on Sago Street, a sort of tenement. We're anxious to get him ourselves and keep him in jail for a while for his own protection. He's by far our best informer, and there are rumors that he's going to be murdered. So we'll raid this place."

He was a young fellow, and uneasy. He looked sideways at Mike.

"Sago Street is not very—uh—shall I say savory? Perhaps it would be wiser if your highness did not accompany us?"

"You just try to keep me away," cried Mikuud-Phni Luangba.

SINGAPORE is not, by and large, a tough town. It is big, and its population is a bewildering mixture of races, and of course it gets a lot of sailors; so that it isn't like Jackson Corners, Iowa. But on the other hand it is not anywhere near as wicked as its reputation.

Sago Street is an exception. It is dark even in the daytime and quiet even at night. You seldom see anybody there, and never anybody who lingers; now and then a hunch-over figure, hands in sleeves, slithers out of one door and into another, and then stillness swoops back with a rush as if eager to reclaim a thoroughfare always hers by rights.

Sago Street, in other words, is enough to give anybody the creeps. It is narrow, it is crooked; the buildings are high, dirty, blank-windowed; and if you can walk down it at any hour without looking over your shoulder every few steps—then you're a better man than I am.

We waited at one end, waited for some other cops to get up and cover the roof, Absolutely nothing moved, and there wasn't a sound of any sort.

"All right," Carse said at last. I don't know how he knew. Maybe he didn't; maybe it just got on his nerves too, and he decided to start.

We crept down the street, revolvers in hand, until we came to a door which looked to me just like every other door along the line. There was no number or anything. The party consisted of Carse, Mike, two Chinese detectives, a harness bull, and me. Two other detectives, one a Chinese, were to cover the roof.

"It's on the top floor," whispered Carse, and opened the door.

If you ever raid a Chinese gunmen's hangout, here's a tip: take a gas mask along. I had supposed, before that door was opened, that I knew something about bad smells; but this was my mistake. Actually it made me stagger back a few steps, as if somebody had pushed me in the chest. I would rather have faced a shower of bullets.

The awful thought was that I might have to face both. It didn't seem fair.

We went in. We were positively leaning forward against that stink the way you lean forward when you walk into a strong wind.

The halls were bare; no light showed under the doors, and the shadows our flashes created were swaying. Behind some door on the second story somebody started to sing in a blurred furry voice, one of those sleepy tuneless Chinese songs; and then he shut up.

Eventually among the other stenches I singled out the sweet sickly one of opium. Somewhere in this house, perhaps everywhere in it, people were hitting the pipe.

There were three floors. On the second a Chinese suddenly opened a door at my elbow, stared at me with popping eyes for an instant, and then, before I could yell or grab him, slammed the door. It made a terrific noise. But after that, after the echoes had chased themselves to rest, we heard nothing.

We held a little conference and decided to push on. After all, there was a uniformed constable stationed in the street outside.

On the third floor, at the head of the stairs, a door was ajar. Carse pushed it open very carefully, holding his revolver cocked in his hand. One of the Chinese detectives behind him flashed a light over

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his shoulder. We were all leaning very low, almost kneeling. We didn't know what to expect.

It was a small bare room and there was a man lying on his back in the middle of the floor. Next to him was a piece of bamboo about two feet long with an earthenware bowl about the size and shape of a large mushroom fastened near one end of it, so we assumed at first that he'd been kicking the gong around, as the boys at home would say. But there was no tube of *chandu*, no cooking needle or spirit lamp.

We straightened, and walked in. With the beam of the flashlight straight down upon his face, we saw what had happened to him. It's a wonder we had not noticed the blood before, there being so much of it. He was—or had been, for his throat was cut from ear to ear—a plump, mild-looking, rather pleasant-faced Chinese.

"Yang," whispered Carse.

He bent down.

We heard a step in the hall, and as one man we whirled around.

A CHINAMAN had come out of a door on the left and was making for the stairs. Apparently he did not know that anything was going on; he was startled when he heard us, even more startled when he turned and saw us, guns and all.

He started to scream. One of the Chinese detectives went up to him and hit him on the side of the head with a revolver butt, and the man fell flat.

But that scream had done the trick. The door through which this fellow had come, the door on the left, was thrown open again, and a man came out. He came crouching low, doubled far over, and shooting with a pistol in each hand, so that none of us had a very good look.

It happened faster than I can tell it. Those who held flashlights naturally snapped them off or else moved them to another place, not wishing to draw lead to themselves, so that for an instant the hall was a jumble of crazily leaping shadows.

When the light steadied, the man was at the foot of the stairs and heading for the next flight. I snapped one shot at him and he answered just once. A Chinese detective suddenly leaned against us, spoiling my next shot. Then the man was gone.

I shrugged off the Chinese, cursing him. But I saw that he had not been up to funny work. He leaned against me because a bullet had broken his right shoulder and he was faint from pain and shock.

We heard a door slam below, then another shot, sounding very far away.

From a nearer door, the one on the left, came a babble of men's voices. Chinese voices, pleading. Our flashlights, held to one side, stabbed the darkness, revealing four befuddled Chinese through the reek of opium fumes. They all looked scared—all but one.

"Throw out your pistols," commanded Carse.

They had already dropped these on the floor. Now they kicked them toward us. All except the one who didn't look scared. *He* had had too much opium, or maybe he was wanted for murder anyway and knew he was as good as hanged if caught. Anyway, instead of kicking a gun he picked one up.

It was the last thing he ever did do. He was slammed back against the wall by a whole volley, and we never knew, or cared, which one of us really killed him. Mike fired, and Carse, and one of the Chinese detectives, and I, all at practically the same split-second. The other Chinese detective was sitting on the floor with his broken shoulder, not making a movement or sound.

There was no more resistance after that. We simply walked in, finding four automatics, three trembling prisoners, one corpse, eight or ten smoking set-ups, sixty tubes of ordinary government *chandu* and more than forty one-mace jars of some unlabeled bootleg product.

Carse was less interested in the opium, an old story to him, than in the automatics. A Singapore cop would give you four truckloads of narcotics for a single con-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fiscated pistol any day. The unwounded detective went to work questioning the prisoners right away; and though I couldn't understand a word of it, it sounded very familiar all the same.

But what interested me most was the coat.

It was a brown gabardine coat, hanging on a nail, and there was a small triangular piece torn out just under the right pocket.

"They say that belong Englishman," the Chinese detective told me. "They say him name Kenneth Kelt, him smoke pipe, fly plane."

"Kenneth Kelt!" This was Carse. "Why, he hasn't been seen in the colony for three years, to the best of my knowledge. He was just about to be deported as a U.B.S. —that's Undesirable British Subject, you know—when we learned a few more interesting things about him and decided to arrest him, but he disappeared. There's been a warrant out for him ever since. He's a pilot, yes. A clever man, I understand, but not exactly what you'd call straight."

"They say him 'flaid police," the detective reported. "Yang, him say him go police. They say him kill Yang."

"I can believe it," said Carse. "Well, we'll soon hear what he has to say for himself. That shot down in the street must have meant that the constable's nabbed him."

"I am afraid," said Mike, entering the room very quietly, "that the shot meant exactly the opposite. The constable is lying on the pavement down there with a bullet through his heart, and Kenneth Kelt isn't in sight—nor for that matter is anyone else."

Carse looked shocked.

"My word! I'd give my long leave to put that scoundrel behind bars! I wonder where he could have gone?"

Mike looked at me, grinning a little.

"Upper Kammorirri, I think," I answered Carse.

"So we fly again, my Georgie?" Mike said.

"We fly again."

CHAPTER IV

TEMPLE OF SCARLET

MAYBE I should have explained in the beginning that this upper Kammorirri country is geography gone nuts. Cliffs and jungle, with hardly enough clear level space to spread a handkerchief on, it hasn't been explored simply because there has never been any reason to explore it.

Mike himself, and in earlier days his old man, had sometimes gone there hunting; but even that, though big game was thick, wasn't any fun; you had to do too much working climbing up and sliding down.

"We'd better find something soon," said Mike.

I glanced at the gas gauge and saw what he meant.

"Holy Moses!"

"Exactly," said Mike.

We had enough left in the tank to keep us up for maybe another twenty minutes. Mike's crate was built for speed, not long distance records; and since our last stop, which was at the palace, we'd been doing a lot of cruising.

"Mike," I said, "let's go home."

"It *would* be nice. Take a look over your shoulder."

I did; and if I'd been chewing gum just then I'd have swallowed it.

It must have come very suddenly. Where a few minutes before there had been nice clear blue sky, picture-book stuff, with fleecy white clouds and all that—now there was sheer blackness. It was growing, too. It was covering the whole sky. It would be upon us in a little while.

Now we could undoubtedly go above it. I knew enough about flying to know that. But what would we do when we got up there? We'd have to come down pretty soon anyway, and where would we come down?

We had just about enough gas left to get back to the palace, if we could find the palace. After all, it was only that, a palace, even if it was a big one. It was set in the middle of the jungle between two hills, and to see it you had to be practically on

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

top of it. To try to find it by dead reckoning, while flying above the clouds, was idiotic.

The only other place to land would be the one we were looking for, whatever that was. There had to be *some* place out here somewhere. It stood to reason. But unless we went directly over it, flying mighty low at that, we might miss it. Landing anywhere else at all, of course, would mean Bye Bye Blackbird.

"What are you going to do?"

"Keep on," answered Mike.

That's the way he was. Crazy maybe, but he had guts. And maybe he wasn't so crazy after all. Maybe the best way to go, when in doubt, is ahead.

I took another look at the storm. It was coming fast. After that I kept looking down, directly upon the land we were flying over, until my eyes hurt.

Mike I knew was tired, which was only natural after flying almost continuously all the way from Singapore. I'd taken the stick now and then, to give him a little rest, but the responsibility was always his. So now I watched, while he flew.

I didn't look behind again. I just looked down.

Mile after mile of it went by; that mass of vegetation so thick that it sopped up sunlight, giving no chance for reflection; it was like a murky swamp. No echo could ever come out of it, no glint of brightness.

But it was not empty. It was packed with death.

The air was oddly light, and I thought electrical. I had a feeling of being encased in something that tingled.

"Good to the last drop," said Mike.

I looked at him.

"Just what do you mean?"

"Hear that hollow, coughy sound? That's the last of our gasoline. Here we *go-oh!*"

The engine conked out. The nose of the plane gave a downward lurch.

You've heard of good things dropping out of heaven in the nick of time? Well, in our case it was just the opposite. *We* were the ones to drop out of heaven, with a thunderstorm nudging us from behind, and the good thing came up to meet us. When another second would have been too late, we found what we were looking for.

And what a thing to find! I couldn't have been more dumbfounded if it had been the Ferry Building. I don't know just what I'd expected—some sort of cleared space, an improvised landing field—but certainly not this!

What was it? Well, I didn't know myself, for a while. You see, there was not much time to study things. We dived, Mike caught her up on the very verge of the structure, we cushioned oofily, and then we struck.

I had a fleet glimpse, on right and left, of what looked like the largest sea serpent of all history, with fan-shaped heads sticking up every few yards. Whirling toward us, as our landing wheels slewed at a hundred miles an hour over stones greased with thick leaf mold, I saw a cube of lichened rock, maybe twenty feet across, on which was engraved something that nobody could talk me into describing.

Then we were past that. We faced a huge platform, black, littered with rocks and rubble, the jungle rising sheer at the far end, on either side that nightmare sea serpent with all the heads.

WE TOOK a bumping, of course. How we missed that great block of stone with the dirty carving on it, I'll never know. But we did. And at last, somehow, right up against what looked like the edge of a cliff with a parapet consisting of muddy footballs, a few yards from the jungle itself, we slished to a stop.

Mike said, "*Phew!*" and took out a platinum cigarette case. "It was a close one, wasn't it, Georgie?"

"And where," asked Mike between puffs as he lighted a cigarette, "where do you suppose we are?"

"Those twisting fences," I said, squinting out at them, first right, then left, "look like something devised to get a man to sign the pledge. And yet—you know, Mike,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

they're sort of familiar. I've seen that shape before, somewhere."

"You have," said Mike. He was frowning a little now, which was not like him. "That happens to be the seven-headed snake Naga. And the thing we just missed, unless I'm mistaken, is engraven with the *linga,* the emblem of Siva the Destroyer."

"You mean to say— What—"

I broke off.

"I don't know what," said Mike. "But Georgie, I'll-be honest with you. I'm just a teeny-weeny bit scared."

Then the storm hit us.

It walloped down upon us with all the vicious fury of a beast that's missed its prey by inches. Which it had, practically. If Mike's plane had been just a little slower, that storm would have caught us in the air, and I hate to think what it wouldn't have done to us.

As it was—for our landing gear seemed to have got wedged against that low lumpy parapet I had seen and we were nicely stuck there—all it could do was shriek at us and try to tear us to pieces, and, after a few seconds, start pelting us with rain.

Did I say rain? Well, you might as well call it that as anything else. It was like masses of white water all around us, masses not quite solid but with just enough space between the drops to allow for hissing and steaming.

It was like being in a whirlpool. You couldn't see anything out of the windows. You couldn't hear anything but the seething shriek of the rain and the bellow of thunder.

This lasted only a few seconds, and then the rain let up a little. Don't misunderstand! It didn't subside to any drizzle. It was still what residents of a non-tropical country would call a cloudburst. But at least it gave you a chance to breathe; and by peering hard, straining your eyes, you could see a few yards from the plane.

"Muddy footballs," is the way I described those rocky shapes which made up the parapet and but for which we would have gone clear off the end of this place and down what looked like an interminable flight of very narrow and very steep stone steps.

Well, peering out now I saw better what they were. Time had been rough with them, but when you were close sufficient of their shapes remained to give you a chance to recognize them—that is, if you happened to know them in the first place.

Now I've mentioned that I'd been reading the Bible. It happened that I also knew something about Brahmanism; for Brahmanism is the state religion of Kammorirri.

There were Parvati and Ganesa . . . and that one over there I was pretty sure was meant to represent Apsaras.

Excited, I turned to Mike.

"Say, we couldn't possible have landed in Angkor?"

He shook his head. He was looking out of the window on his side, and no doubt he recognized a lot more of the half-obliterated stone figures than I did.

"We're a long, long way from Angkor, Georgie."

He was as excited as I was. We had to shout to make one another heard.

"Look," he yelled, "that's Krishna down there! And that's Devatas. And do you know what *that* is?"

"Do you know what *this* is?" I yelled back, pointing to it. "It's a hole in the side of the plane."

HE LOOKED up, a trifle impatient. But he saw that it was a hole, sure enough. And it hadn't been there ten seconds ago. What's more, when we looked over to the other side of the cabin we saw another hole, about the same size, exactly opposite the first.

Then another one appeared, and another. Then a slightly larger one, surrounded by milky whiteness, in the non-shatterable glass of the window not three inches from my chin. And in the window on the opposite side there came still another.

"Somebody's shooting at us!"

We fell flat, and I reached up and opened the door on my side half an inch. I nodded

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

toward the other door, and Mike nodded back that he understood. I stuck a flashlight into my hip pocket.

We pushed out, each on his own side, into the battering rain. I lost sight of Mike, but I knew he'd head for the steps. We always worked together that way.

Fight back? At what? Remember, we never even *heard* the shots, so loud was the storm. The holes appeared as if by magic, it seemed on both sides of the plane at once. In other words, we didn't even know from which direction the bullets were coming.

As far as seeing anybody was concerned, you couldn't have seen anybody more than a few yards away in that downpour. Whoever he was, he couldn't see us either, of course.

But he could see the plane. That would be visible between gusts of rain and in flashes of lightning. And if he kept peppering the side of the plane long enough, and if his ammunition lasted, and he had any luck at all, he was sure to get one or both of us.

So we scrammed.

I stumbled on hands and knees over thick slimy leaf mold whipped into a jelly by rain which spear-clanged off it, stinging my face. I found a "football," Ramá or Dvarapalas or whatever it was, and slid over it.

The steps were even steeper than I'd thought. They were broad, broader than any court house steps at home, but they were only a couple of inches deep. What's more, they'd been so chipped and worn by time and were so slick with the jungle's refuse, that you just had to take it easy. If you ever slipped you'd keep right on going; it would be like a chute.

I did slide once. I'd been in too much of a hurry, and my feet went from under me. I scrambled and fought to get a grip with elbows, fingernails, knees, anything, even my chin. But I began to slide.

Then a small hand, a dainty hand, went around my left wrist, from above, and I heard Mike call, "Take it easy, Georgie!" He held me just long enough to let me get a grip. I don't think he could have held me much longer if he'd wanted to.

We went side by side after that, so that we could help one another if need be, and we went very slowly. Rain sizzled around us, slashing us.

When we found an opening we were glad enough to crawl in out of that terrible rain. At first we thought it was only a sort of break in the stones, but as we were straightening out there came a flash of lightning and we saw that this was a door cut into the side of the building.

It was maybe ten feet square. How deep it was we couldn't see, though the corridor seemed to go straight on in to the center of this building.

In the lightning flash we both saw pedestaled in rock a large stone likeness of the Buddha. There he sat, tranquil, soundless, regarding his tummy. And then the lightning passed, and we were in darkness again.

I didn't say anything. I let Mike break the silence, which he did presently by lighting a cigarette. I thought I saw the flame wobble a little; but his voice, when he spoke, was firm. I think that the sight of that Buddha had done him good. Other men have other ideas, of course. It was none of my business.

"You've got the torch, Georgie? Good! Let us explore this place."

MIKE and I both realized before we had gone far along that vast dank corridor what he had probably suspected right away; that we had dropped down upon another of those immense ruined temples that you could not match in Yucatan or Peru or Persia or Egypt or anywhere else.

The place was immense, and I don't mean just figuratively! How Kenneth Kelt had discovered it we did not know, except that it was probably as we had, accidentally, from the air.

Armstrong and I, among the few persons who had ever penetrated the upper Kammorirri country, for all I know might have passed within fifty yards of this

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mighty structure without seeing anything to indicate its presence. That's the kind of jungle they have there.

"Did you hear something?" I whispered, stopping.

"Bats," said Mike.

I turned the beam of the flash upward, and there they were, thousands of them, hundreds of thousands, clinging in thick black masses, head-down, to a ceiling we couldn't, because of them, even see. They squealed a little, rustling pettishly like birds, when the light found them.

We walked on. We walked, I'll swear, miles. Up one corridor, down another, across great blank chambers, along rickety balconies, over piles of rock where parts of the ceiling had fallen in.

Now and then we would catch a glint of daylight as we passed some opening, and hear the senseless *whee-ee-ee* of the wind and the roar of falling rain. Thunder reverberated through the whole temple, but it was a thunder we did not so much hear as feel.

Sometimes we passed places where water, tumbling through holes we could not see, splattered and splashed slyly, furtively, as if ashamed of itself for violating this sanctuary.

But when we heard the howls, we knew that they were human.

Howls of rage they were, shrill, high, not so loud as the thunder but far more immediate, individual, urgent. They rose and fell, broke off, started up again. They filled the whole place, unearthly enough before, with an unearthly clamor.

One man, you would say. Or was it two, now? There was a sob hidden in the sound. Where did it come from? We couldn't be sure, except that it was somewhere very close. It had started almost at our elbows.

The howl subsided to a wail, a whimper, and then ceased. Mike and I stood staring at one another.

"We've got to find him, whoever he is," Mike whispered.

I nodded.

We started to prowl.

The light, a strong one, seemed crushed and crowded in this place. Shadows shouldered one another into its path, breaking it, blurring it, so that we were never sure whether we were in a large room or a small one—if you could call any of the rooms in that place small—and had to devote all our attention to our feet.

There were holes in the floor, places where it had fallen through, some tiny, some very wide. To drop into one of those might mean only a sprained ankle, or it might mean a broken leg, or instant death.

Mike kicked a stone into one once, and we stood listening, heads cocked. I suppose it was actually only a few seconds, but it seemed whole minutes before we heard it hit bottom.

We shivered a little. It was sort of chilly in that place.

As we started to move away there was a hideous shriek right in front of us.

I stepped back so fast that I stepped into a crevice and went on my knees, and the flashlight fell to the floor. We could hear it roll. Lord, I thought, if it falls down one of those holes . . . It didn't. On hands and knees I started for the spot I had last heard it.

When my extended hand touched a human arm, I stiffened, halting.

"That you, Georgie?"

Mike, I gathered, was as twittery as I was.

"I didn't know but what you might be knocked out," he whispered, "so I started to look for the flash."

Between us, we found it easily enough. And just as we did so there was another high hideous shriek that seemed to come, in fact, from the very flashlight itself. I shook my head, gritting my teeth, cursing. The acoustics in this place were ga-ga, I told myself. These damp walls and bat-plastered ceilings, these bas-reliefs of the gods of India were playing tricks with echoes.

When I switched on the light, Mike and I found that we were kneeling at the very edge of a pit about ten feet across, and when I turned the beam down into this pit we saw where the screams had come from.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THERE were three lunatics in yellow. The first thing we saw of them was their eyes, wide open and flaring with rage; the next was their slathering mouths and glistening bald heads.

They were incredibly skinny men with long bony hands and broken fingernails from which blood dripped as again and again they sprang up, scrabbling in vain at the sides of the pit.

They could not see us, of course, for the blinding light; but they kept screaming and yammering, their heads raised, and they kept jumping up, trying to get out. The pit was at least twenty feet deep and its sides were slick with slime.

After a while they fell back, exhausted, to sit in the filth at the bottom; but they still glared up at us.

"Bakous," whispered Mike.

"Yes."

Anyone who has traveled in those parts has seen them. They are some sort of Buddhist monks who wander the roads in apparent aimlessness or else stand in silent groups around the shrines, not begging, not paying any attention to one another or to anybody else.

Bakous, they are called; and they wear a toga of bright yellow cheesecloth, nothing else. With their shaven pates, their crossed arms, their shoulders hunched up around their tight pallid faces, they resembled benevolent turkey buzzards, if you can imagine such a thing.

They always look at least a trifle mad; but these in the pit were gibbering idiots.

"Could they have fallen in? All three of them?"

"I don't see how. From the look of them, they must have been down there for weeks."

If it was obvious that they could not see us, because of the light, it was equally obvious that they hated us with the intensity of maniacs, supposing that we were the persons who had put them there.

I moved the light around, disclosing some marvelous bas-reliefs depicting scenes from the Mahabarata, but nothing in the nature of a ladder or a rope.

Mike tried to talk to them, tried three or four languages and as many local dialects, but clearly they did not understand. Nor could Mike understand what it was they were trying to convey when occasionally they snarled back at him.

"If we did get them out," Mike reasoned, "they'd only try to kill us."

So we moved on. One of the Bakous emitted a shriek as we turned our backs to them, and it seemed to go the very length of my spine.

Nothing reflected light in this lost place of worship, where the shadows seemed to twist and squirm away from the flash's beam as if resenting its presence. And this is the reason why, when the light abruptly was thrown back at us in scarlet splendor, we gasped, instinctively reaching for our guns. Immediately afterward we relaxed.

"Now," said Mike, "we're getting somewhere!"

I think it was the first time either of us had drawn a full breath since we entered the place. For we both felt at home in the presence of rubies.

CHAPTER V

THE VANISHING PRINCE

THERE were at least two hundred of them, every one a beauty. Kenneth Kelt and his associate the phoney missionary evidently were like Armstrong and me: they didn't bother with the petty stuff.

These, laid out on a sort of altar which had perhaps been a place of sacrifice or something in the old days, would knock your eye out: All pure pigeon-bloods. I could not imagine how the market would behave when these stones began to appear.

What's more, when they *did* appear it would be just as they were now. For—and here's what gave us a jolt—these were not rough gems torn out of the mountainside, the sort Armstrong and I had carried away. These had been cut and polished; and cut and polished by an expert too.

Lying on that dark altar in the heart of an ancient lost temple, they were just as they might have been in a jeweler's

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

window—if any jeweler had possessed the capital to put on such a display.

Because I estimated that this lot of rubies must have been worth close to a million dollars.

I went close to them, wondering, feeling a little frightened, the way I always did in the presence of really lovely gems, the way you feel when you go into a big dim church or cathedral. They were exquisitely cut.

When I was able to shift my eyes from the array, I looked around. And I saw at least part of the explanation. This altar-like article had been turned into a practical workbench, with every necessary device and tool of the lapidary's art. And they'd been used recently.

"It's not hard to guess the meaning of this," said Mike. "If they went out into civilization with stones like this, uncut, the word would get around that there was some new ruby mine somewhere, and their movements in the immediate past would be looked up—which naturally they wouldn't want. But they could sell them in this form, if they took their time, without raising suspicion."

"Incidentally," I said, "where *are* those babies?"

"It's a big place," Mike pointed out. "Let's hope that when we do meet them, we see them first."

He said it solemnly, and then he grinned quickly at me.

"Amen," said I.

We prowled a bit, but the only other thing of interest we found was a sun helmet. It had been worn a lot and was dirty, but it bore the label of a good shop in Singapore. On the sweat band were the intials *G.L.*

"Let's go topside," Mike suggested. "I'd like to make sure nothing's happened to the plane."

This was not as easy as it sounded. We found several stairways, but when we started up them we learned that they were blocked by debris. Nor did we dare to try to force our way through.

Poking around in a joint like that, you can't be too careful. If we had tried to move the barriers, we might have precipitated a small landslide and got ourselves nicely buried under a few tons of rock.

So we kept looking.

At last we found a sure-enough ascent, a broad grand staircase leading to a large opening in the roof through which teemed rain.

We went up very carefully, our guns out.

The storm was temperamental. Sometimes rain came so hard that it lashed itself into a steam-like spray as difficult to see through as that much fog. At other times there was more wind but the rain came in long sweeping gusts, not too pleasant, but not blinding. This was the way it was behaving when Mike and I returned to the roof.

Even after all the mooching around downstairs, we were startled by its size. It must have been a thousand feet long and at least a hundred and fifty broad. It was singularly clear of sticks and stones, a fact which shouldn't have surprised us but did; we soon reasoned that it was kept that way by Kelt.

The sacred snake Naga, many times repeated, coiled its rocky length along the two long sides, lifting a hundred heads in more or less good condition after all the centuries. One end had fallen off a bit, the whole end of the building seemed to have collapsed; but at the other end, where the parapet of worn gods stood, where Mike's monoplane was parked, the floor was smooth.

The plane seemed to be all right. We did not venture close to it.

In the middle of the roof was the great cube of stone, or *prasat,* which we'd missed by inches. It must have weighed thousands of tons. I wondered how many men had taken how many weeks to haul it up here. The temple, as you could see by looking beyond Naga, was no shanty; it was the height of a five- or six-story building.

But what interested us most of all was the other plane.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

IT WAS, like Mike's, a small monoplane, and it looked, like Mike's, fast. It was lashed to the lee side of the *prasat* by a rope which passed several times around that enormous mass.

We did not go near it, for the same reason that we did not go near Mike's plane—because we didn't know who might be watching us, and didn't want to show ourselves out in the open. We only peeped over the edge of the roof.

Then the rain came straight down again, came harder, and its splattered spray rose like a mist, so that we could scarcely see ten feet.

We went below and had a conference.

There was not much discussion. Right now it would be nice, we both said, to fly back to the Sultan's palace and equip an expedition to come and rediscover this temple and raise hell with its occupants.

However, there were several things opposed to that. In the first place, we didn't have any gas.

Well, there must be gas in the temple somewhere; there was another airplane here. We could look for it and maybe find it.

And maybe get killed when we tried to put it into Mike's plane, too.

That was the second objection. We knew that there was somebody in this place, somebody probably far more familiar with its intricate layout than we were, and who was very eager to see us dead. Would we be allowed to find gasoline, haul it up to the roof, fuel the plane, wheel it about, take off—all this without being punctured? Nonsense!

But even supposing that we got away with it, even supposing that the storm let up at a convenient time, and we took off, and that we made the palace without hurt—what then? Whoever it was who shared this place with us now would have disappeared long before we could get back.

Remember, it wasn't the rubies themselves Mike was really worried about—what was a million dollars or so to him? —but the secret of the mine, the secret of this temple. *That* must not get out.

"Here's what we do," I said, in a spurt of common sense. "We go down to where those stones are, and we wait. Sooner or later whoever it was left them there will get worried about them, especially knowing that we're loose, and will come after them."

"Georgie, that's the brightest thought you ever had!"

. . . It was not much fun, waiting. Dank dungeon-like spots are usually pictured as being filled with scurrying rats, but there weren't any rats in that place. What would they be doing there? What would they eat? A rat isn't interested in hanging around a building merely for the purpose of supplying local color.

Fortunately there were not any bats either. They stuck to the bigger chambers, where they could be as far as possible from the floor.

No, there wasn't anything except Mike and me and the rubies—and an atmosphere thick, heavy, wet, forbidding. Mike was at the other end of the altar. I couldn't see him; I couldn't see anything at all.

Sometimes I thought I could catch a glow of the rubies between us, but of course this was my imagination. Rubies, like diamonds, no matter how good they are, don't give forth light from themselves. They will pick up and reflect light so thin and faint that you never suspected its existence; but they aren't lamps.

Well, there I stayed for a long while, in absolute darkness. I could hear the distant shriek of the wind; now and then I fancied I heard a dribble of water; once, far away, one of the Bakous, deep in his pit, screamed hideously; and without pause, though almost unnoticed, as if it were a customary condition, the echoes of muted thunder bounced back and forth.

When at last I heard a sound right in the chamber with us, I stiffened. It was the sound of somebody walking across the floor.

THE agreement Mike and I had reached was that, when anybody appeared we would wait until his light threatened to

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

expose us, and then I would snap the flash into his face and we'd both present artillery, taking him by surprise. But this guy, whoever he was, wasn't showing any light.

That would be strange enough in ordinary darkness; but in this place where there wasn't the faintest gray reflection, and where the floor was littered with fallen stones and pitted with dangerous holes, it was extraordinary.

I waited, not knowing what to do. I didn't want to snap on the flash until I had something to aim at; I wanted to blind the guy and take him by surprise. For all I knew, he had a gun of his own.

He came very slowly. It was agony, waiting for him. Sometimes that man seemed right next to me, sometimes he seemed yards and yards away.

At last I heard him, unmistakably, at the altar. He must have been right between Mike and me, not more than a few feet from either of us. Then I heard an odd clicking, a sound that was unique and could mean only one thing.

The man was picking up the rubies.

Without even thinking, maybe with some subconscious idea of protecting those gems, I must have taken a step forward. A stone must have rolled under my foot. Anyway I heard a sharp intake of breath—and the clicking sound ceased.

Now I did not know what to do. I had just about decided to switch on the flash anyway, when a hand touched my face.

I can't tell you what a scare it gave me. I've been through enough tight places so that I can venture to admit being scared, and I certainly was this time. I just froze. And when I snapped out of it, a split-second later, I found that I'd dropped the flashlight.

I lurched forward, swinging my left. I had my gun in my right. I couldn't take the time, then, to try to find the flashlight.

My fist grazed a shoulder and I collided with the guy. Our faces practically slammed together. He grabbed my right forearm. His fist plopped wetly against my mouth. And then we went down.

Yes, I could have fired. I could have drilled him. There were three reasons why I didn't.

In the first place I didn't know whether he had a gun, and I couldn't be quite that cold-blooded.

In the second place I didn't want any noise because I didn't want to draw his friends.

In the third place, and this was most important, I might have shot clear through him and the bullet might have come out the other side and hit Mike, who I supposed was coming up from behind the man. That may sound goofy, but it's been known to happen. My gun is a big calibered one, and I didn't want to take the chance. So, deliberately, I dropped it.

As I say, we went down. We rolled. We kicked and slugged and used our knees. Neither of us said a word: We were much to busy trying to slaughter one another.

I couldn't understand why he didn't yell. But he didn't. He didn't make a sound.

I couldn't understand, either, what had happened to Mike. But I did not have much time to think about this or anything else. I had a real fight on my hands.

Back and forth we went, whamming against rocks, humping over stones, teetering once on the edge of what must have been a deep pit, rolling back again. I figured that he was as tall as I was but not as heavy. But he was wiry. And he was desperate.

It took me a long time to get him flat on his back and to get a knee squeezing against his gizzard so that he couldn't struggle any more. My other knee was inside his left elbow, pressing it against the floor. I was holding his right wrist. This left me a free hand, and I took some matches from my pocket and struck one on the seat of my pants.

"Marlin!"

"Good Lord," I yelped. *"Armstrong!"*

THERE was no thought of holding him, once I knew who he was. Not for a second would you suspect a man like Armstrong of any crooked work. You'd under-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stand what I mean if you ever met him. I helped him to his feet, and I fumbled around and found the flash.

"I say, how in the world did you get here?" he asked, panting.

"How did *you* get here?" I asked, doing likewise.

We were delighted to see one another. But where was Mike? I played the flash all over the chamber and could see no sign of him.

"They held me up, right after we parted. I don't know what they did with my Burmese boys. Killed them, like as not."

"It was Mike who brought *me* here," I said. "I think we ought to find him first. Why didn't you show a light when you came in?"

"Didn't have one to show. They took my matches away. I suppose they thought matches might help me get out of the pit they'd put me in. Well, I got out anyway, just now. I was going to slip outside and take my chances on beating my way to civilization. But I didn't want to go without my rubies."

"*Your* rubies?"

"Well, of course they're not mine. Twenty-two of them are the ones I took as my share when you and I split up. The rest these men stole. Took 'em out of the mountain themselves. And they forced me to cut and polish them."

"Seems to me I'd heard that you used to be a lapidary."

"Yes. In Amsterdam. And they must have known that. The one called Langford, it seems he brought the skeep and so-forth. He knows something about cutting gems, but when he faced rubies as lovely as these he got panicky. He tried a few and spoiled them. So they decided to make me cut them. I didn't mind. It gave me something to do, and it was better than staying in that pit."

"With the Bakous?"

"No, I was alone. Another pit. Past theirs."

"Let's go looking for Mike," I suggested. "We'll talk as we go along."

The only thing I could figure was that Mike, during the long wait in darkness, had got to worrying about his plane. Maybe he'd just thought he would shake the kinks out of his legs and reassure himself, thought he could easily find the steps, which as a matter of fact weren't far from this chamber. He'd meant to come right back, but he'd got lost. That's the way I figured it.

All the same, I was mighty worried. I hardly paid any attention to what Armstrong was telling me.

"THEY wanted me to report that the stones we'd found were mere spinels and to turn in twenty-two spinels instead of the stones I had. They offered me all sorts of money. Then they threatened me with torture. Finally they got the idea of making me cut and polish the stones. It had been a long while since I'd done any work like that, and I rather enjoyed it. You know, I think I really fell in love with them—the stones, I mean."

"You did a swell job."

"I was going to take them along with me just now, partly because I wanted to have something to prove my story when I got back to civilization, if I did get back; partly because I didn't want such lovely things to belong to such scoundrels; and partly because, as I say, I'd got to love them and hated the thought of parting from them.

"Langford is the one who met you and pretended to be a missionary. I heard them talking about it. He was going to travel with you a little way and see if he couldn't substitute some spinels for the rubies you carried.

"They weren't going to try to bribe you—partly because you had so many carriers and the story might get out, partly because they didn't think that your report would carry as much weight as mine anyway. And if you came in with spinels and told a story of them being switched on the way by a missionary, naturally nobody would believe you.

"They didn't think you'd tell such a story. They supposed you'd cover yourself

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

by saying, if you ever noticed the difference, that they'd been spinels all along.

"That would mean, what with my report, that at least there wouldn't be any excitement about the discovery of a new mining field. At least they'd be allowed a little longer to work it here themselves, as poachers. They had a fortune already, but they wanted more."

"Langford I've met, of course. And Kelt I've met too. Who else is there?"

"Claessens. He's an Australian. Kelt, it seems, discovered this temple in the first place, by accident, while flying out of his course. He made a forced landing and got poking around here and found what looked to him like ruby possibilities. The place you and I got those rubies from is very near here, Marlin."

I nodded. I had already guessed that. But I was wishing we would find Mike.

"As far as I can see, Kelt supplied the original discovery and the flying ability, Langford supplied most of the capital and all the mining knowledge, such as it is, while Claessens seems to be just a sort of combination cook and bodyguard."

We poked our heads above the roof level. Mike's plane had been wheeled to one side; it seemed safe enough, and was lashed to one end of Naga's horrid length.

At the far end of the roof was Kenneth Kelt's plane, the landing wheels blocked by stones. It looked as if they were planning a take-off. The rain still came down, in long swishing sweeps, but the wind was moderate, the storm was subsiding now.

Mike was not anywhere on the roof.

"I don't like this a bit," I told Armstrong. "They knew Mike and I are here, and I don't like to think what they might try to do to that kid if they lay hands on him."

Armstrong looked sideways at me.

"They wouldn't be very nice to *you*, either, for that matter."

"Let's go down to where we were. Mike might have found his way back and be wondering what happened to me."

We went back to the room where the altar was. *It* was still there. But Mike wasn't.

And neither were the rubies.

CHAPTER VI

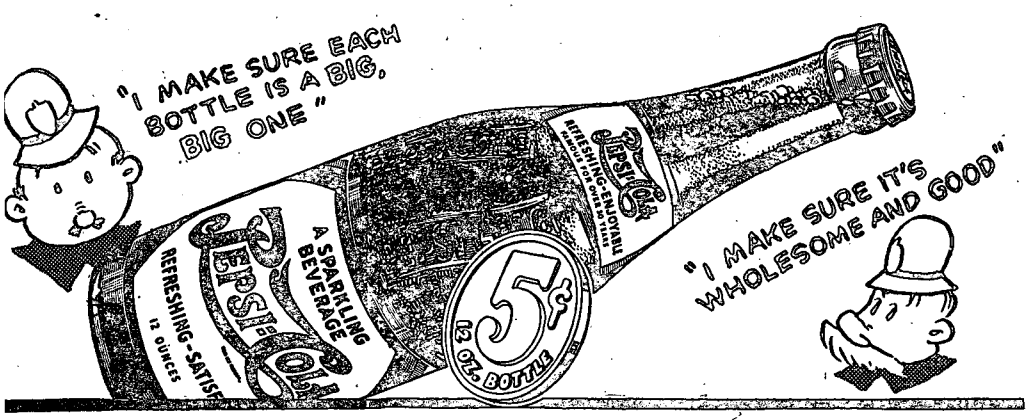
OLD FASHIONED WISDOM

MY FIRST impulse was to start yelling—to run this way and that, yelling Mike's name. I had a hard time restraining myself. It was dumb of me to feel that way about him, because he was perfectly capable of taking care of himself; but feel that way I did, every time he got into trouble. I suppose maybe it was because he was so little.

I turned to Armstrong.

"I still think he just got lost and he'll come back to this place, but I'm too nervous to stand and wait. Do you know your way around in here?"

"They took good care that I shouldn't



PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

learn. All I know is the space between this room and where they had me in the pit. I know that perfectly, which is why I dared to make it just now without any light. But aside from that, I'm as lost as you are."

While I was trying to think of what to do about it, a scream of rage ripped the air; then another, and another. The Bakous were at it again. But they were not howling now, they were screaming. And it seemed to me that now they sounded immediately furious, with something to scream *at*.

I lifted my chin, blinking. Without looking at Armstrong, I asked, "Do you know where *they* are?"

"Oh, yes. Poor devils, they were here when Kelt and the others came. Lost, I suppose. Or maybe they'd stumbled into the place by accident and had some crazy worship of their own here. It was Claessens' idea to chuck them down into that pit. They didn't dare let them get away and give the secret of this place to the outside world. It would have been kinder to kill them outright.

"Yes, I know the place. You have to pass it to get here from the pit where they kept me."

"Then you could find it again, without any light?"

"I'm sure I could."

"Swell! You go there, and I'll be hanging onto the back of your coat. And whatever you do, *don't make any noise!*"

It took us a long time because we went so cautiously, and all the while, though intermittently, we heard the screaming. And what was more important, as we got closer we could hear sometimes between screams the low voices of men who were not mad.

When we first saw the light, Armstrong reached a hand behind him to touch my arm and warn me. He didn't need to. In fact I slipped around in front of him then, drawing my gun. His part of the job was finished. Mine was just beginning.

The light drizzled hesitantly through a vast high doorway. Very carefully I stuck my head around the side of that doorway.

MIKE stood on the edge of the pit. He was safe. They'd tied his hands behind his back; but he was safe. His chin was high, and there was arrogance in his backbone. He wasn't taking anything from anybody.

Next to him stood a man who must have been Claessens. He looked like a thug. More, he looked like a man who was *trying* to look like a thug. He was big, as big as I am, and young, and he had sandy hair that grew very low on his forehead, hard blue eyes, a broken nose, a face peeling with sunburn. His fists were clenched and he glared down at Mike, whose face was cold with contempt.

In one corner of the chamber stood Kenneth Kelt, a familiar Webley self-loader in his fist. In another corner was Langford, the man who had told me he came to these parts to spread the Word. Langford too held a gun. He and Kelt, however, faced opposite directions, Langford facing the door where I was.

"He'll come all right," Claessens was saying. "He'll come charging in like a bull when he hears you scream. If these animals"—he spat into the pit—"will ever shut up."

Mike said nothing, and his silence taunted Claessens, who expected men to cringe in his presence.

"Maybe you think you *won't* scream, eh?"

Mike knew that he wouldn't, knew he'd faint with pain before he made a sound; but he also knew that it wasn't any use telling that to this swine. All of which I could read in his back, his position. He had his back to me.

Claessens shook a rope in front of his face. The other end of the rope was fastened around a rock.

"He'll come, I tell you. He's crazy about you. Everybody knows that. Are you going to yell for him now, or am I going to have to beat you until you do?"

Still Mike was silent. I began to get the idea. There were only two doors to this chamber, and they figured that no matter which one I used they'd get me.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

They figured I'd come on the run, too excited even to draw my gun. The instant I appeared they'd blast me down; Langford if it was by this door, Kelt if it was by the other.

They did not want anybody to escape from this temple and tell what was going on here. Not until they were good and ready to go themselves. Not until they'd cleaned up even more than they already had. They weren't satisfied with a million dollars.

"Would you like me to kick you down among the Yellow Peril down there, maybe? You know what they'd do to you, don't you?"

He wanted Mike to whine, wanted him to agree to yell for me. He didn't know the lad.

"All right, *be* brave! And see how you like this!"

The rope was a thin one, but new and strong, and there was a knot in the end of it. Claessens raised it like a whip and like a whip he brought it down, with all his strength, on Mike's back.

The kid was wearing only a thin shirt. The rope cut this like a razor, and cut the skin beneath it, so that blood gushed out.

I could have killed Claessens then and there, and I still can't understand why I didn't. I had my gun raised, had Claessens in the sights. And I was probably as sore as I've ever been in my life. I was wild. I couldn't swallow, I couldn't breathe.

But somehow I held the shot. Somehow I couldn't murder a man in cold blood. I had to have him at least know I was there. I had to face him.

So I did a very foolish thing.

I stepped through the doorway.

"Drop that!"

IT MUST be that in my rage I had completely forgotten Langford and Kelt. Langford fired instantly, and the shot brought me to my senses. It sounded like a cannon in that grim chamber. It seemed to jar the whole temple.

I fired at Langford, and he started to to walk backward, his mouth open, his gun still raised. He looked stunned.

I saw Kelt whirl around, then duck and dash for the opposite doorway. I didn't have a chance to shoot him. I still wasn't certain of Langford, who was on his feet. So I shot Langford again, very carefully this time, through the heart. By then Kelt was gone.

Claessens had dropped the rope and he stood there gawping. He might have been strong, but he certainly wasn't any quick thinker. Once again I should have killed him like a mad dog; but once again I didn't.

But this time it was different. I wanted to give myself the satisfaction of smashing his face in.

Don Quixote, eh? Well, maybe. But he wasn't wearing a coat, and he didn't have a gun on him that I could see, and I was so sore that not for an instant did I doubt that I could put him to sleep.

He got his mitts up. He even swung at me as I came in. I'm a big target, too, but he managed to miss me. And I let him have it smack on the point of the chin, bringing it up from near the floor somewhere and putting every ounce of my body behind it. He went down like a pasteboard dummy in a shooting gallery, and disappeared from sight—just like that.

It seemed to be a miracle. But when I heard the yammering from the pit I realized what had happened. I'd knocked him right over backward into that pit. The rope he'd dropped had caught around his ankle and it snaked down into the pit after him.

The noise down there was something terrible to hear. But I never heard another sound from Claessens himself.

I didn't care. I was grabbing Mike by that time and making him tell me that he was all right, and untying his wrists. And he was smiling at me, cool as ever.

"Of course I'm all right, Georgie. You should not get so excited."

I was cursing and I guess crying at the same time. Armstrong came running through the doorway.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You fool! Kelt could have killed you. He could do it yet, from the darkness over there."

I looked up, blinking, and saw that he was right. But Kelt was gone.

"It must mean he's the one who has the rubies," said Armstrong. "He doesn't care what happens to his pals, as long as he gets away!"

Mike said quietly, as I untied him, "Haul Claessens out, somebody. After all, there might be time to save the poor brute yet."

The three of us went to the edge of the pit and looked down—and promptly backed away again, feeling sick. No, there wasn't time to save him. It was too late to do anything about Claessens.

Mike explained in a few words what had happened, which was just what I'd guessed. He'd got muscle-stiff and bored, and had fallen to worrying about his plane, so he slipped off quietly, confident that he could have a look at the roof and get back without bothering me.

He had remembered the way, or thought he did. But he'd gone wrong somewhere. He had not wanted to call out to me, for fear of warning Kelt and the others.

And then he had walked around a corner and bumped right into them.

BUT I wasn't listening. I was hopping with excitement. Langford was dead, Claessens was emphatically dead. I wanted to go right out and kill Kelt, wherever he was. I was really sore.

"Wait a minute," Mike cautioned. "After all, he knows this building much better than you do, and he might—"

It was then that we heard the roar of the airplane engine.

"He's taking off!"

The three of us ran. In spite of the flashlight, which I held and which was joggling up and down erratically, we stumbled over rocks, we tripped in crevices, we took wrong turnings. And when at last we emerged into daylight it was only in time to see Kelt's plane, the blocks kicked from under the wheels, starting along the roof.

We yelled. But what good could that do? I raised my gun.

It was still raining, but nothing like the way it had been. The plane gathered speed, bumping along, coming toward us. We were half way along the roof, just opposite the *prasat*.

Before I had a chance to fire, something got in the way. Three leaping, arm-waving figures in yellow cheesecloth, their bright bald heads wet with rain, their mouths open, eyes popping, bloodstained hands raised high.

We had forgotten that Claessens had taken the rope-end with him when he fell into that pit. It had been wrapped around his ankle, and the other end was fastened to a rock.

The Bakous must have been familiar with this temple, which for a time they'd had to themselves. They must have known some shorter way up to the roof.

They must have known too that Kelt had arrived in a plane. They associated him with it. And without hesitation they ran straight toward it.

Once again we yelled. Those mad priests couldn't hear anything. They probably couldn't even hear the bellow of the engine. Instead of dodging aside, they ran straight at the oncoming plane.

Kelt had too much speed up to stop. And he couldn't swerve. On one side he would have crashed Naga the snake and so down over the side of the temple; on the other, he would run into the stone *prasat*.

And I couldn't shoot, for fear of hitting a Bakou.

It was horrible to watch. They ran right into the whirling propeller, those three poor insane wretches. Right into it! Arms outstretched, fists clenched, heads raised, they were shrieking in rage when it happened.

I've been trying ever since not to think about it.

But even that did not stop the plane. It had been going too fast, and Kelt, seeing the Bakous coming, had made a desperate effort to lift it from the roof.

It *slee*-ed past us, missing us by inches, missing the *prasat* by no more. It skidded

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in the wet slippery black leaf mold that carpeted the roof. Twice around it went, completely around, a plane covered with blood and shreds of flesh and poor pathetic wisps of yellow cheesecloth. Twice around —and then it struck the muddy footballs representing Parvati - and Devatas and Krishna and Dvarapalas and all the rest, and went right over them, and vanished.

We found the wreck at the bottom of that flight of steep outside steps down which I myself had so nearly fallen. Kelt either had been thrown out or had jumped, for he was lying half way down.

Rain beat upon his upturned face. A sack he had evidently been holding had burst open, and a million dollars' worth of rubies were scattered over him and on down the steps and into the jungle.

But those rubies were not going to do him any good now. His back was broken.

IT WAS a week later and we were sitting in the bar at the Raffles, watching rickshas roll along Beach Road.

"So I see no reason why the secret should not stay in Kammorirri. We three," Mike went on, "are all who know of it. Mr. Armstrong here has promised he will not tell, and I believe him. There are not many men I would trust to keep such a secret: it needs more than honesty, it needs strength. But you are one of them, Mr. Armstrong."

"Thank you, your highness."

"And of course," he beamed on me, "I know I can trust Georgie. He's a good man, Georgie. He reads the Bible."

"Cut it out, Mike," I growled.

"Your highness," he corrected. "You must get used to that, here in Singapore."

"Your highness," I muttered.

We each took a drink.

"But listen, Mike, I mean your highness," I said. "We've got a date in a little while with the representatives of that syndicate. What are you going to tell them?"

"That they were right and I was wrong. That I was mistaken about those spinels, thinking them real rubies. And you will tell them the same. And Mr. Armstrong here, his prestige will not suffer, for he has not yet reported. He will report that they were spinels."

"Certainly they were spinels," said Armstrong.

"But my gosh, Mike! You're not—"

"Your highness."

"Well, your highness, then. Listen! You know more about rubies than everybody in that outfit put together! Are you going to let those self-satisfied, frozen-faced money guzzlers think that—"

"Let them think what they wish. You and I, we know the truth. Which makes us rich, eh? How does it go. The eleventh verse of the eighth capter of Proverbs: 'For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired—' "

"Oh, go fry!"

"Your highness," he corrected.

"Your highness."

THE END

Backache, Leg Pains May Be Danger Sign

Of Tired Kidneys—How To Get Happy Relief

If backache and leg pains are making you miserable, don't just complain and do nothing about them. Nature may be warning you that your kidneys need attention.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking excess acids and poisonous waste out of the blood. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.

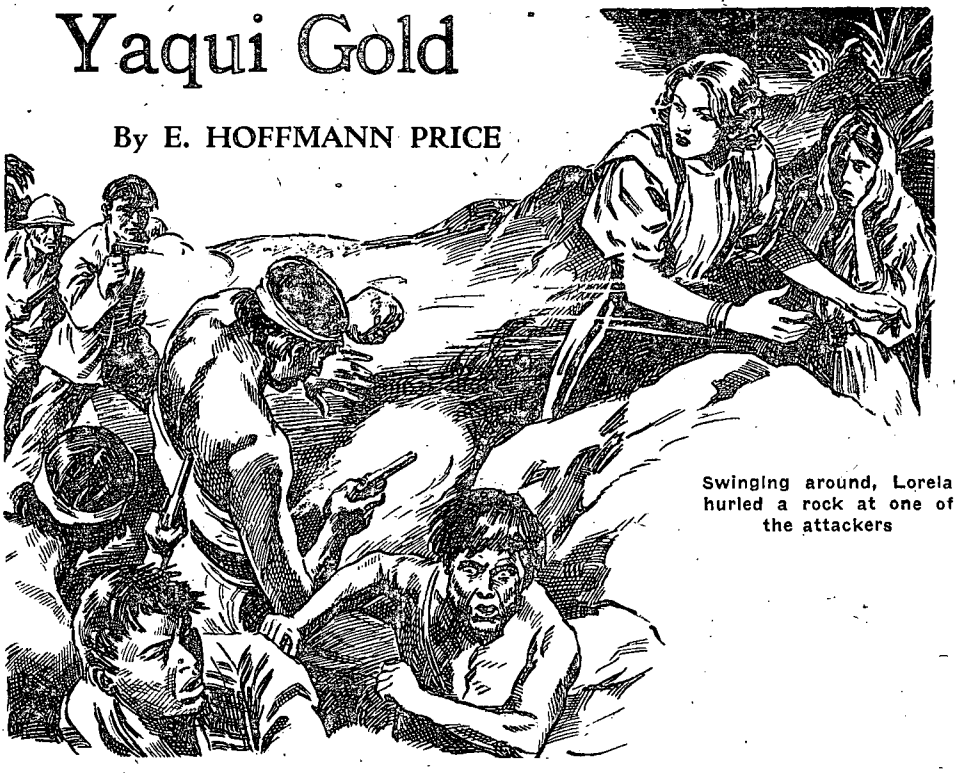
If the 15 miles of kidney tubes and filters don't work well, poisonous waste matter stays in the blood. These poisons may start nagging backaches, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from the blood. Get Doan's Pills. (ADV.)

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Yaqui Gold

By E. HOFFMANN PRICE



Swinging around, Lorela hurled a rock at one of the attackers

Start now this exciting story of the wild Mexican land where the war drums still thunder an ancient defiance

DON WAYLAND has been hired by a couple of smart promoters, Dennis and Ledgate, to fly a plane over savage Yaqui land in an attempt to locate the lost Tiopa Mine. But Wayland has been stalling in the town of Guaymas, convinced that the plane which his employers have procured for him isn't trustworthy.

Then, too, there's a strong attraction in Guaymas—namely Lorela Romero, who sings at a night club called the White Tower. She's a mystery, this fascinating redhead, and all Don Wayland can be sure of is that he loves her.

Eventually Dennis and Ledgate talk him into making the flight, and Wayland takes off, accompanied by Herb Keller, a photographer. Over the wild Yaqui region the plane is followed by buzzards, and this grim omen is soon borne out by disaster. Wayland encounters serious engine trouble, and while he is attempting to land the ailing plane, he is spotted by a band of Yaquis. It is only after Herb Keller has been badly wounded by the Indians that Wayland manages to drive them off.

AFTER days of terrible suffering Wayland and Keller find refuge in the camp of one Gilbert Frayne. This shabby, middle-aged man Wayland has seen back in Guaymas; and now he learns that Frayne is also in search of the lost Tiopa Mine. Dennis and Ledgate, Frayne claims, have stolen from him important clues to the location of the mine, which he has been interested in for years.

Now Don Wayland, in the course of his disastrous flight, did discover the Lake of the Gods, a landmark in the trail to the mine. Frayne asks him to join his expedition, to lead the way to the lake; but Wayland refuses to doublecross his employers. So the two men, camped together in Yaqui land, are in a sense enemies.

This story began in last week's Argosy

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

That night the camp is awakened by guns down the canyon. Frayne orders his men—"tame" Yaquis—to arm themselves, and as he and Wayland set out to reconnoiter they hear, strangely, a woman's cry. . . .

IN GUAYMAS Dennis and Ledgate have learned that Wayland crashed in Yaqui land, but they are more worried over the fact that Gilbert Frayne may reach the Tiopa Mine before them. Dennis has been an ardent admirer of Lorela's, but Ledgate has become convinced that she is a spy for someone.

Probably Ledgate's hand is in the attempted kidnaping of Lorela, a scheme frustrated by the girl's valiant Indian servant, Tula. Afterward Lorela discovers that her room has been ransacked, and so now her identity must be known to Dennis and Ledgate: She is the daughter of Gilbert Frayne. There's only one thing for her to do now—to set out with Tula for Yaqui land and join her father. . . .

CHAPTER VI

THE ROAD TO PERIL

THE road to Yaqui land was good—for almost exactly eight miles. That is, aside from heaps of crushed rock not yet spread out, and steamrollers parked without red lights, and a center line temporarily marked with squared stones destined for culverts, the road was navigable.

It had been officially open for some months, which meant that for some years traveling at night would be risky. The heaving and pitching of the *libre* flung Lorela and Tula against each other, against the front seat, and against the ceiling.

The chauffeur had a wheel to which he could cling. Tula was screeching, "Faster, faster!"

"Wh-h-h-hat is the hurry?" Lorela found breath to ask.

"That Ybarra. One seldom beats him once. One never beats him twice. Especially not two women."

Then the road became really bad. The driver protested. "This is too much. Figure it for yourselves, ladies. You need an ox cart, though a burro would be much better. This is mapped as very poor wagon road."

"You have a very poor wagon. Drive on," Lorela said. "I'm paying you extra."

In another hour, they covered eight miles. Steam poured out of the radiator. The stench of hot oil became plainer. Boulders dotted the deeply rutted road.

There were halts to hunt water, far down in deep ravines. Halts to let the simmering oil cool. Halts so that the driver's arms would not go numb at the wheel. Fenders, shaken loose, wove and rattled and thumped. A wheel came off, for vibration had loosened the lugs. These things all took time.

The driver became glassy-eyed, after ten hours of torment. Lorela said, "Let me."

He protested just a little. Then he took a long pull at a bottle of tequila, and curled up in the back seat with Tula. She said, "Pig, give me a drink too!"

The engine was becoming noisier. Or perhaps it was the increasing silence of the hills. They seemed to be holding their breath. Lorela become painfully tense, waiting for something to happen. She was more afraid of what was ahead than of the pursuit from Guaymas. Ybarra, she reasoned, could hardly travel faster than she had, and she had gotten at least half an hour's start.

She was afraid of Yaqui land. Afraid of the next range, which had to be crossed before reaching Tonichi and the Yaqui River. And perhaps for all this desperate haste, she would not be able to overtake her father, either to warn him or to take refuge with him.

After an hour's pounding, Lorela began to respect the driver of the sturdy hack. Her arms were ready to drop from their sockets. Pains shot through the back of her neck. The cramp in her throttle foot had almost reached her knee. "I'm scared," she told herself. "this isn't bad if you take it easy. I'm just scared silly. Tula!"

"Si, señorita."

"Pass me that tequila."

"But, you cannot drink. Not after this pig of a driver."

"Pass me that tequila, I'd drink after anybody."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Lorela pulled up, wiped the neck of the bottle on her skirt, and shuddered as she listened to the boiling water in the radiator. She shuddered more when she took a gulp of the tequila. But a second swallow took some of the kinks from her neck.

Lorela decided that she could not be lost, simply because there were no cross roads, no forks. The only way to get off the trail was to drive over the edge, and down perhaps a thousand-foot drop. Though to avoid this, she often had to keep the inside wheels cocked high up on the hillside.

THE sun was rising; dawn's first gray made the headlights pallid. Lorela found new life in that mysterious freshening of the air, the upswing of vitality as if the earth's self were waking up.

Then she hit the rock. The front axle cleared, but the oil pan fouled. The jolt awakened the passengers. The driver jumped out. In a moment he yelled, "You have broken the engine, the oil is running out."

Most of Tula's blouse plugged the leak. But a lot of oil had been lost, and the steepest upgrade pulls had to be made very slowly.

It was nearly noon when they reached Tonichi. The driver said, "I will have to stay here for a long time, I cannot drive back. I have to send for the new oil pan."

"Ship your car by train," Lorela said, "down to Cócorit. I'll pay the freight."

Tonichi was the end of the spur that branched from the main line which ran down to Mexico City. The trains, slow and infrequent, had not offered her any chance of quickly eluding her pursuers.

She could have taken refuge with the police, but that would not have warned her father. Sooner or later, Latin optimism would have called her story quite preposterous, and then the thugs would make a second attempt.

Lorela paid the freight. Luckily, she had just received her weekly salary, and in cash, which she had kept in the hotel safe.

The only hotel in Tonichi was the second floor of a grocery store. There were three rooms, each with canvas cots. There were no closets, since anyone with clothes other than what he wore on his back would surely have sense enough, the natives reasoned, to stay at home.

A fragment of mirror, a washstand, a pitcher and basin completed the furnishings. And, as is often the case in mountain towns, the place was clean.

The town was scattered over steep slopes, and the Yaqui River roared past the outskirts. The biggest building was the railway station. From her window, which faced downstream, Lorela could see the tracks that followed the gorge of the foaming river. In the yards, an absurd little locomotive hissed and fumed.

"While you sleep," Tula said, "I go to find the friend of your father's *capataz*, that Santana Chayoga. Me, I had lots of rest while you were driving. And you should not pay the freight; that fool, it is his fault if he owns a *libre* that cannot climb over little rocks any ox cart can pass over."

Just then the old Indian woman who owned the downstairs grocery store came in to get the plates on which she had served *huevos rancheros*. "And how do you color your hair that way, *señorita?*"

Lorela laughed. "It grows that way."

The old woman was incredulous, but polite. "Just imagine such a thing! And how beautiful. Mine used to be black, but I would have liked red. Now go to sleep. See, I hang a *serapi* over the window, so!"

It was dark when Lorela awoke. She was not worried by Tula's absence. It took hours to hire horses and guides. They liked to haggle.

Later, a full-blown riot startled her. The old *tiendadera* cried, "No, you can't see her! She's tired, and it is not fitting anyway; she is a lady!"

"But I have to see the *rubia!* You old fool, do you want her killed in your house? Let me go up!"

Lorela went to the door and called down the stairs, "Let him tell me from the hall, while I dress. Maybe it is important."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It was the cab driver, "While I am at the freight yards to have my car loaded, I see two men at the station. They are asking everyone for a lady with red hair. One is an angry man with bandages over his face but what I can see is ugly enough. If he catches you, people will think that I, Jose Domingo Morales y del Rincón, took my passengers out and robbed them!"

Then his chest deflated. "And please, *señorita,* do not tell anyone that I warned you, this fellow has four *pelados* with him. Assassins, surely."

He hurried down the stairs before Lorela could question him.

AN HOUR later, Tula returned. She had an armful of clothes: a coarse blue skirt, rawhide *guaraches,* a shawl and a blouse. "Put these on. I bought them from our mule driver's wife. Come, let us go now."

Thirty minutes later, Lorela was riding a shaggy burro, not much larger than a Saint Bernard. Tall men who spoke a singsong language went ahead; these, she apprehensively told herself, must be Yaqui Mansos—"tame Yaquis." Others trailed along behind, on foot.

The blackness of the gorge made Lorela instinctively lower her voice when she leaned over to speak to Tula. The *click-clock-clack* of the burros' tiny hooves seemed unnaturally loud.

For four hours they followed the narrow trail that sometimes was near enough to the river for the foam to drench it, sometimes a thousand feet above. Then came a halt, and a few hours of rest, with a *serapi* to keep out the chill of bare rocks.

Well before dawn, the *capataz* prodded his men to their feet. For Lorela's benefit, there was coffee. Cold tortillas and jerked beef were eaten on the march. Both made her jaws ache, and threatened her teeth. All morning the sun blazed down into the gorge. Mountains on either side cut off whatever coolness could have come from the distant gulf. That afternoon, Lorela could look down at the back trail. Horsemen were following. Dangerous work, for no horse was surefooted as a burro; but in the better stretches, his faster pace did win an advantage.

"May the saints help us!" Tula said.

"My father," Lorela reasoned, "will be taking his time. We'll meet him before they catch up."

The following day, the enemy seemed to lose ground. Lorela's fatigue began to approach exhaustion. "Thank God!" She sighed, and looked back. "They're hardly in sight. You'd have to tie me to this burro pretty soon!"

Tula was dusty, and the grimness of her ugly face had become more pronounced; but otherwise, she showed no effects of the day and night march. Nor did the "tame" Yaquis. They seemed inhuman. The *capataz* wanted to lurk in hiding to ambush Ybarra and his crew, but Lorela insisted on advancing. "We've gained, don't you see?"

His slanted little eyes did not change expression. He turned, and the caravan went on. After all, it is hard for four men to make an ambuscade to wipe out twice as many of the kind who followed Ybarra.

THEN, when Lorela was sure their swift progress had gained them some measure of safety, the attacks came suddenly. It was at night, and but for the vigilance of the *capataz,* Ybarra's unexpected arrival would have been fatal. As it was, the warning yell was cut short by rifle fire. Bullets zinged from the rock walls. The Yaquis answered with their revolvers and automatic pistols. They found cover where it seemed impossible for a man to hide.

The *capataz* yelled, "Get going, get going! You two, on the way; we'll hold them, we can!"

Lorela did not need a second telling. She gasped to Tula, as they escaped in a spattering of stray slugs: "How could they have fooled us?"

"My guess—I remember the old times, *señorita*—they picked up enough helpers to fake losing ground. You understand? Let the useless horses fall back, which

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

we see, and do not suspect. Then most of them crowded forward when they knew we couldn't see the backtrail. We are fooled, we are careless, no?"

The four Yaquis fought a splendid rear-guard action, but they were outnumbered. The rumble of the river had for a while drowned the boom and crackle of guns, but now Lorela could again hear the noise, the yelling, the combined voices of pursuers.

"The *capataz* has lost some men," Tula said. "He can't hold Ybarra."

She was all too right. The caravan chief came panting up the trail. Behind him, a pistol blazed. There was answering fire.

"Hurry!" he shouted in his guttural Spanish. "Can't stop them much more."

He staggered. He was wounded. He probably had few cartridges left. He gestured, knelt in a crevice he had instinctively picked in the gloom. His remaining men came blundering up the rocky trail, and tried to join his chief. But the *capataz* said, "Go, like I said. I hold this place. You see—up there—you find a place—hide the *rubia,* you fool!"

He lurched, and recovered. Lorela said, "He's badly hurt."

"Go on, go on." Tula whacked the burro. "You can't help him. Anyway he's a fighting man!"

From the rear, a familiar, rasping voice came through a lull: "Stop, we will not hurt you! You do not understand—we won't harm the *rubia.*"

The *capataz'* pistol cut into that. A man yelled. There was a loud splash. A horse must have reared and fallen into the river.

Lorela was so certain of capture that she was already resigned. Two men were dead or fatally wounded; the brave *capataz* was barely able to stand, and the final Indio not much better off.

"Tula," she said, "we'll just get our last two men murdered, and you and I can't carry on alone. We can't get out."

Lorela turned in the saddle, and called: "Don't shoot, we'll stop!"

Then Tula said, hoarsely. "Come, come! I see a light! I smell a camp. Men and animals and coffee and tobacco!"

Tula jerked Lorela from her burro. "On foot, we make it. See the light in the water. Smell the tobacco. Gringo tobacco!"

Suddenly, then, they were wet with new violence. Guns rattled up ahead, and someone shouted. The rush of men from behind was checked. And in that tumult Lorela heard a voice cry in English: "Down, damn it, down!" She made a dive for the rocks, slashing her hands and knees. Bullets zinged overhead. Heavy boots pounded down the grade, then men in *guaraches* came, silent and swift; they had knives. White men and Indios met Ybarra's group.

"Dad!" Lorela cried, sure of that voice.

She hurled a rock at the man whose white bandage made him conspicuous in the gloom. It caught his arm, deflected his pistol. Then came a shot from the side, and he doubled up.

That broke the raid. The survivors scattered frantically downstream.

Lorela saw the slight figure of her father coming quickly toward her; and then, as her hands went out to him, a voice said: "Wait a second, Prof. I got an interest there myself."

He was close to her then, standing big beside her father; and in a flicker of light she could see his amazed grin. "Don," she cried. She threw herself toward the two men, reaching for them, and laughing.

CHAPTER VII

A KNIFE AT NIGHT!

IN FRAYNE'S camp, there was a three-cornered exchange of explanations. That the prima donna of the Silver Tower was the daughter of a professor at Great Western University was too much for Wayland. "I still don't made it," he said. "Disguises and pursuits; daughters chasing after their fathers in the Yaqui wilderness."

Frayne chuckled. "This is my sabbatical year, and I decided to find the Tiopa Mine. For fun. For professional standing. And for money. Political upsets may nose me out of Great Western."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I didn't know that," Lorela said. "Neither did mother."

"At all events, there was a lot of what you might call domestic opposition to this little venture. So I slipped out, quietly, to avoid argument. But not quietly enough to avoid the attention of those thoroughgoing scoundrels, Ledgate and Dennis."

"Being a guest," Wayland said, stiffly, "I can hardly dispute your opinion."

"You'd not want to," Lorela cut in. "As I started to tell you—I tried to tell Dad that night when I saw him at the Tower—I had come to spy on Dennis and Ledgate, and also to get word of him, and to talk him out of such an insane idea."

"Thanks." Frayne made an airy gesture with his pipe. "Now you've made yourself a lunacy commission."

She frowned at him; then she smiled, and continued: "You can imagine how it would have been if Corey Ledgate or Elmer Dennis had seen that unexpected meeting. You didn't know me, but I was so shocked at seeing you, and glad and afraid, that I almost made a scene. Where on earth were you staying? I looked all over and sent Tula out looking for an American of you description."

Frayne answered, "I made it a point to have Ledgate or Dennis see me every day, while Chayoga was outfitting this caravan, but I would hardly be around your flossy hotel. And as for that Silver Tower, do you think it would be such an attraction? I finally did go in, and you finally didn't talk me out of going into the mountains. And then what?"

Lorela said, "After Don's plane cracked up, Elmer Dennis must have suspected and ordered Uriel Ybarra—that's what Tula calls him—to try to kidnap me. So, I've got to go with you. If I were kidnapped, they'd use me as a lever to pry you out of the mountains."

Wayland's face had become longer and longer. Finally he blurted it out: "It does look as if I've been working for crooks. But everything is contradictory. You, for instance. First, you didn't want me to fly, then you egged me on."

Lorela nodded. "That's true. I came to Guaymas to find my father and beg him to give up his crazy plan. At all events, to help him if I could. Elmer Dennis is a mining engineer, and we've had trouble with him before. So my dancing and his new enterprises with Corey Ledgate all clicked. I'd heard of him, but he'd never seen me."

Frayne interpolated, "That was in Bolivia, when I'd left my family at home. Dennis was roughshod and tricky, but I never suspected him of attempting kidnapping and murder."

"So you made a chump of me because I worked for those guys?"

She started to say no. Then she met Wayland's eyes, steadily, for a moment and at last said, "First I wanted you not to fly, because you might find the mine before Dad possibly could. Remember, I did not then know just where he was, and if he had left Guaymas already, I wanted him to win.

"Then I wanted you to fly. After I had met him at the Silver Tower, and I begged him to quit and go home. He refused. So I wanted you to find the site, quickly, before he got too far into the mountains."

Frayne chuckled. "Idea being that I'd have sense enough to retreat?"

"Of course; isn't it simple?"

Wayland rose. "I've gotten the runaround very nicely. This lovely creature played me for a dope right from the first day I met her. You tried to herd me into partnership with you, saying that if Keller could live till I got him to the railhead at Tonichi, he could as well survive on the march inland. Now, it seems Tonichi, according to your daughter's story, is not far downstream."

"Very true, Wayland. I did take advantage of your fatigue. You didn't know how close you and Keller were to Tonichi. Say, three days, the way you were traveling. I took advantage of you because I am not becoming younger, my tenure at the university may end, and I have a family to consider. But I was really taking advantage of Dennis and Ledgate.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I am sorry that you had to be their employee."

Frayne's dignity, and his candor pulled the teeth of Wayland's wrath. Here was a man well past middle age, and he went out alone, calmly and unafraid, to get a fresh start.

Wayland said to Frayne, "Let's not wrangle. We've all had a long day. But tomorrow, I am going downstream with the Indios who brought your daughter up from Tonichi."

Frayne had noted how carefully Don and Lorela were ignoring each other now. But he smiled to himself, and said to Chayoga, the caravan chief, "Fix up shelters. Use tarpaulins if you can."

"Yes, *amo*."

"See if the wounded guards are comfortable. I owe my daughter's life to them."

"They are all well taken care of, *amo*. But Ybarra escaped, we had no chance to finish him."

Wayland faced Frayne. "Good night, sir." Then he turned to follow Chayoga.

LORELA and her father sat for a little while by the dying fire. But soon the camp was asleep. The *tamenes* were stretched out about the dying embers. One squatted in a crevice in the rocks. His head drooped, his rifle was across his knees. But despite his posture, he was watching. He had never been able to understand the white man's insane habit of marching back and forth while on guard. His father had bushwhacked enough soldiers and *rurales* to convince him that military precision is idiotic.

Yet there was one thing that the watcher either did not see, or else saw and ignored. A man was worming his way through the further shadows. He moved only as a Yaqui can. There was a glint of steel, now then, as he headed toward the tarpaulin which sheltered Wayland; it was arranged tentwise.

He was wrong in assuming that the American could at once shake off the tension of the preceding days. A Yaqui can relax the moment flight is over, and thus the prowler made the mistake of judging Wayland by himself. Wayland was half-dead for lack of rest, but his tortured nerves would not permit him to sink easily into a deep sleep.

Suddenly he sat up. In his half-sleep, he had been yelling a warning at Keller. Bit by bit, he realized that the cry had not actually reached his lips. It had echoed only in his mind, else the camp would be in an uproar. He sighed, wiped sweat from his forehead. But he did not quite relax into the contentment of newly found safety.

There was a scent of native tobacco. In the gloom, a moment later, metal gleamed dully. The utter absence of sound made this uncanny. Wayland was still shaken by his nightmare. Instead of waiting, or fumbling for the pistol under his head, he moved by instinct which is as often wrong as right.

The intruder expected a man sound asleep. He was caught off-guard. There was a grunt, a thump, then breath sharply drawn as they grappled in the gloom, and toppled to the hard earth.

Wayland warded off the descending knife. The surprise had failed, and he had a chance, now that the tarpaulin was kicked aside. He knew already that this was a Yaqui. The corded muscles, the wiry frame, the very odor of the savage made that clear. Wayland was surprised that no bones snapped when he wrenched the fellow's wrist and at the same time dropped back to make the most of his weight.

Metal grated across the rocky floor. Wayland's pistol, unlocked during the skirmish, let go with one of the few remaining cartridges in the spare clip. That aroused the camp. Wayland kept the persistent knife from getting home, though it raked him, time and again. Twice he missed a chance to drive his knee home for a blow that would settle even a Yaqui.

Frayne was shouting, "Chayoga! What's going on?"

Lorela cried, "Dad, are you hurt?" She darted from her A-shaped tarpaulin, and Tula came after her, calling on the saints.

Porters and drivers yelled. The burros

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

brayed and squealed, and the goats taken along to supply meat on the hoof began bleating. Wayland's assailant broke away. The confusion helped. He was gone before Wayland could recover his pistol, or regain his feet.

A FLASHLIGHT blazed. Frayne shouted to his daughter, "I'm all right." He gave Wayland a hand. "What happened?"

"Turn the light on me a bit, and you'll see!" His shirt was blood splashed from shallow slashes. "You have pretty reliable helpers. He didn't do so badly for working on me in the dark."

Lorela had pushed through the crowd. She heard Wayland's bitter words and flared up. "That's a contemptible thing to say. After dad pulled you out of the river and doctored your half-dead photographer!"

Frayne said, calmly, "He was attacked in my camp." Then, to Wayland: "But do you really think I'd be responsible for anything like that?"

There was a pause, and then Wayland said quietly: "Sorry. I lost my head. But it must have been one of your men. Could an outsider have slipped into camp? If one had, would he have picked on my little shelter; or would he have gone to your tent, the most important thing in camp? I owe you an apology, but I still think you have some zealous men who declared open season because I'm working for your enemies."

Lorela's eyes softened, and she caught Wayland's hand. "Don, let's forget about it until morning. I'm glad you weren't hurt. And I wish you would go with us."

She did not wait for an answer. As she left, Chayoga came up, and Frayne asked, "Who did this? Is one of your men missing?"

"I will see, *amo*."

Frayne paced about, sizing things up by the light of the gasoline lantern which one of the men had brought him. "Wayland, I am sure this wasn't an attempt to murder you. Judging from the way the tarpaulin is cut, it looks like petty thievery. Someone tried to snitch your pistol. When you jumped him, he became desperate."

"Maybe so. Every Yaqui is a born thief, and after centuries of oppression, I can't blame them, I guess."

Chayoga returned to set up the flattened shelter. "*Amo,* it was Baycuri. He is gone."

Chayoga's left leg dragged a trifle; no one would notice that slight limp except from close and suspicious observation. Wayland was not convinced that Baycuri was guilty. And when he found the crescent-shaped bit of metal freshly chipped from a knife blade, he palmed it and said nothing. Things had to be thought out. First of all, see if Chayoga's knife had lost a half-moon shaped fragment from slashing against the rocky floor of Wayland's shelter.

Chayoga, hearing that the strangers worked for Dennis and Ledgate, might have decided to do his employer a good turn.

Far off in the hills, Yaqui drums muttered. It was crazy, this business of Frayne and Lorela going into the unexplored mountains. And Wayland went to sleep wondering whether to join the Fraynes or stick with his dubious employers.

WHEN sunrise and the chatter of the *tamenes* aroused Wayland, he could scarcely believe that he had slept. The tang of wood fire and the fragrance of dark-roasted Mexican coffee flavored the crisp wind that came down from the Sierra. There was a twittering of small birds, the plantive querying of quail.

They were calling, *"Cuida'o! Cuida'o!"* Quail talk since time began; but this morning, for the first time, Wayland realized that they were saying the Spanish word which means, "Look out!"

Burros brayed like calliopes all out of tune. The *tamenes* cursed them. Packs creaked. Wayland savored the smells, relished the sounds, and was glad. The worst night was never bad, not if one lived to see dawn in camp.

Keller was no longer delirious. He would pull through, Wayland decided, as he used Frayne's razor to mow the sandy stubble from his chin.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Hello, Dad! Don, do you still hate me?" Lorela asked, when she joined the two at the fire.

"A night's sleep does make a difference. No, and I never could. But you two are crazy, going into these mountains."

Frayne sighed. "I told you that Chayoga is the cousin of Yacupaz, war chief of the Yaquis. I can go in, where no other white man could. Dennis and Ledgate can sell stock, yes. But they can't work that mine, even if they do find it. Don't you understand, the Yaquis have kept whites out for centuries, and they'll continue. Particularly since the present administration falls over backward to prove that today the Yaqui is always right."

"But, have you the answers?"

"Years ago, I bought Chayoga out of slavery."

"Nuts, Prof." Wayland shook his head, grinned, wagged two fingers sceptically. "That's too much; grateful savage now gives you a gold mine."

"Have it your way. But in one shipment, two thousand captive Yaquis were carried off to work in the hemp fields of Yucatan. To die like flies. I bought Chayoga, and released him, and he's been with me ever since. A friend."

Wayland frowned. "Look here. You don't talk like a Ph.D., or an F.R.S. and so on. I've seen lots of profs, and they all talked like books."

"Thanks." Frayne made an ironic bow. "Only, I'm a practical person, as a side line. Education is like fertilizer. A little helps, an excess burns up the crop."

"Dad, didn't you bring even one diploma?" Lorela asked. "Or a gown or something?"

"Cut it out, cut it out!" Wayland raised a defensive hand.

Frayne went on, "Now that you are used to a non absent-minded scientist, try to get used to a second idea, equally radical and just as plausible. Dennis and Ledgate are a pair of skunks who do not deserve your loyalty. You told me as much last night, only you do not seem to realize it."

"How's that?"

"They offered you ten percent interest in the Tiopa Mine, and then sent you up in a crate that was all ready to blow up. They were too stingy to get you a good plane. Or else they were too short of funds. In non-academic terms, they were flat busted. In which case, how can they develop that mine legitimately?"

Lorela emptied her aluminum mug of coffee. "See, Don? The buildup. Why don't you team up with us?"

Frayne grinned engagingly. "I'll give you two porters to carry Keller if you insist. Go ahead and tell about the Lake of the Gods. Every time Dennis and Ledgate send a party to stake a claim, the Yaquis will shoot them up."

Wayland rose, paced about, head thrust forward. "It was a lousy trick, sending me out with that wobbly motor. I overhauled it myself, as best I could, with native mechanics, but they could have gotten the plane I wanted. They've cheated you; they've tried kidnapping and murder." He stopped his pacing abruptly. "I'm with you, Doctor." He grinned. "Or is it professor?"

"Make it Gil, and let it go at that." He thrust out his hand and Wayland accepted it.

Lorela scandalized Tula by running from her place at the fire and throwing both arms about her new ally. "Darling, I'm so glad! It was awful, thinking of you as an enemy, back there in Guaymas."

"As long as you'll iron out a few inconsistencies—" He held her at arm's length. "You look great in that Mexican outfit, even if it is the worse for wear."

"Well, I am, myself. A bit battered, I mean."

BEFORE Frayne had gulped his second mug of coffee, all but the final packs were loaded. Chayoga had made a litter for Herb Keller; two burros carried him upstream.

Wayland had only to touch Keller's forehead to learn that the fever was steadily subsiding. He looked for a moment at the off-center nose, the rugged face. Keller's

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

warped mouth was slack now, but his lips were no longer black. He looked up, blankly, then slumped. He was still groggy from bromides.

The porters bent under their packs as they filed up the narrow ledge that skirted the river. They stretched out with that swinging, slow stride that they could keep up day and night through the toughest going.

The dizzying freshness of the air got into Wayland's blood. He told himself that this was just Mexico, but something shouted him down. The barren crags, the stark blue sky overhead, the savage river: this could not be so close to home.

The sun poured down into the ravine. Bald rocks reflected the glare, and for a short while before the noonday halt, the river mirrored it up to the ledge. Wayland peeled off his shirt and with several dry sticks improvised a canopy for Keller. Tula doctored his wounds with mountain herbs.

That afternoon the caravan doubled back in a monstrous horseshoe, a thousand feet above the past night's camp, and no more than a mile further inland. As soon as the high peaks began to cut off the sun, the wind became chilly. Far overhead, *zopilotes* circled. Someone, they hoped, would die.

Wayland heard a far-off drumming. At first it was so faint that he called it an acoustical trick of the stream. The Yaquis, though, bent forward under their loads, had their bullet heads cocked toward the sound.

Tum-tumpa-tum . . . tumpa-tumpa-tum. The accent cropped up in the wrong place; it spoke of resentment against everything that a white man calls orderly and harmonious. Wayland left Keller's side and stretched long legs toward the head of the column. He wanted to tell Frayne that those drums meant business.

He moved swiftly, and with unconscious stealth. He almost stumbled over a man kneeling in a niche in the rocky wall. There was hardly more than enough room to slip between the cliff and the file of animals.

The man was Santana Chayoga. He was cutting off an annoying shred of loosened leather from the sole of his boot. Wayland got a clear look at the heavy knife. He snatched it from the Indian's hand.

"I thought so." Wayland indicated the chipped blade. "I have the missing piece. I found it right where Baycuri and I were playing last night."

Chayoga's face was immobile as Wayland produced the fragment he had saved. It was a perfect fit. He returned the knife to the Yaqui. "Better luck next time!"

When Wayland caught up with Frayne, he had had time to think twice about this business of exposing Chayoga. That would take tact; not for courtesy's sake, but to convince the stubborn scholar.

Frayne said, "You've come up to tell me about the drums? I like them. How's Keller?"

"Riding comfortably. Tula changed the bandages—didn't like yours."

Chayoga came trotting up. "*Amo,* it is early but we must camp just over the crest. The next spot is much too far."

"I'll look it over with you," Frayne said, and followed the Yaqui.

Wayland sat down on a rock, and let the caravan file past. Keller was clawing at the cords that bound him to his litter. "Get this junk off me. I want to sit up. Ow, damn it, what happened to my leg? Say, where'd you get all these burros? Gimme a drink, and then tell me how'd we outrun 'em?"

Wayland unhooked his canteen. "I snitched a boat. Remember? After that raft broke up in the rapids, and we both nearly drowned."

Keller snatched the canteen. He gulped, sputtered when he tasted the water. "Phoey! Listen, I said a drink. Ain't there any tequila, even?"

"Water for you, Herb. You're a sick man."

"Oh, all right. Lousy stuff, though."

WHEN the litter cleared the crest, the *tamenes* were already at work, unloading pack saddles, driving burros to the picket line that had just been set up. With prowling panthers, the pack animals could not be turned out to graze.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It was still early, but the sun was gilding the peaks which only a little while ago had been a glaring bluish white. Purple shadows reached across *barrancas* a mile deep. Just over the next ridge, perhaps, was the Lake of the Gods; a short distance as the zopilote flies, but days of hard marching for men.

Then Keller saw Frayne and Lorela. "For cripes sake—say, am I cockeyed, or what do I see? Where'd you find her?"

The photographer's stage whisper had a fog-horn range. Lorela laughed and said, "At the Silver Tower, of course! How's the invalid?"

"Better. Who's the old guy talking to the Indian?"

"That's my father. Doctor Frayne."

"Don't make sense. None of it. Doctor—" He groaned. "I'll get a bill as long as a Chinese dream, calling a doctor all the way from town."

So Frayne and Lorela helped Wayland explain things. When Keller pieced it all together, he said, "Pretty good, pretty good. I always told you we was working for a pair of heels, particularly that mug of a Dennis."

Once the men had eaten, Chayoga came to the fire and said to Frayne, "*Amo,* it is best to rest here tomorrow. We have a hard climb ahead, and the animals are worn out. This is a good place. Lots of water at the foot of the mesa. There are ducks, so we do not eat too much of the rations we carry, no?"

Frayne said, "Very good." Then, to Wayland: "Chayoga misses nothing."

"Probably not." Wayland fingered the knife fragment in his pocket, and thought better of offering it as evidence against Chayoga. He doubted that he could convince Frayne that the *capataz* was treacherous.

Wayland's suspicion of Chayoga was what made him sleep lightly; a furtive stirring awakened him. He felt rather than heard the stealthy motion. It was inside the dark camp. He knew better than to sit up in his shelter, or to call. Cautiously, he reached for his pistol.

The moon would soon rise, but until it cleared the peaks, the half-transparency of the darkness was more deceptive than outright gloom. A pebble rattled. Then came minutes of silence broken only by the wind.

A panther's cry mocked him from the ravine. Something moved at the lip of the mesa. Whether it approached or receded, he could not tell, but certainly no stealth was needed for leaving the camp. So Wayland fired.

There was no outcry until an instant later, when the aroused porters came from their shelters. Frayne cried, "Now what?"

Lorela, wrapped up in a *serapi,* came out to say, "This is getting to be a habit!"

"Watch yourselves!" Wayland raised his voice over the hubbub. "Someone was sneaking into camp. Heads down!"

"Huh—what'zat?" Keller struck a match.

"Put it out, you idiot!"

The flurry was over in a moment. There was no attack, no rattle of rocks dislodged by men scaling the slope of the mesa. Frayne called, "Chayoga! Chayoga, where are you?"

There was no answer. Presently, a *tamén* came up and said, "*Señor,* he is not here."

A search of the mesa was wasted effort. Frayne demanded, finally, "Are you sure you didn't hit Chayoga when you fired?"

"I didn't hit anything," Wayland answered. "There was no yell, no sound of a man falling down the slope."

Neither torch nor flashlight nor gasoline lantern exposed any trace of blood. There was only one certainty: Chayoga had vanished.

Finally Wayland spoke his mind: "He's run out on you. He's the one who tried to knife me." He held out the fragment of steel and went on, "I showed him this piece of broken blade. I intended it as a warning against more monkey business. I guess he was afraid I'd tell you.

"Now we're stranded with a dozen or so wild men who could cut our throats or desert, or do as they damn please, now that their chief is gone. They may be Yaqui Mansos, but they'll go wild."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Frayne shook his head. "I still don't believe he tried to stab you. You didn't actually fit that chip into his blade, and working around camp, he could have broken his knife in many ways. I think he'll be back. So take it easy. And these *mansos* may surprise you by fighting their wild friends!"

Wayland turned back toward his shelter. "I wish I had money to bet against that!"

CHAPTER VIII

HUTS OF PROUD PEOPLE

NOT more than a mile north of the crescent-shaped lake where Wayland's plane had crashed was a rocky ledge which overhung the unexplored Rio Bavispe. On this shelf was a Yaqui village; and rising from it was a cliff whose face was dotted with caverns. These were partly natural and partly artificial, once the home of the long extinct aborigines, and now occupied by the Yaquis who had fled from airplane attacks on their fertile but exposed *mesas*.

Shelters of pine boughs projected like storm doors from the cavern mouths at the level of the ledge. Ladders reached up the second and third tier of burrows. A few scrawny firs grew from the shallow soil of the ledge, and at one end was a patch of stunted maize. From one of the caverns ran a scanty stream which trickled perhaps a hundred yards to the edge of the shelf and then dropped three thousand feet down the vertical wall of the *barranca* at whose bottom the Bavispe flowed.

No men were in sight. There were only brown women wearing tanned hides, or skirts and blouses stolen from lowland villages; and naked brats who looked as starved as their mothers. The women had black hair, bound low at the nape of the neck in a club-shaped knot, and gleaming with rancid fat.

All but one of these women were grinding acorns and maize in stone mortars; and she was well apart from the others. She crouched at the mouth of a cavern that was near a pyramidal tongue of granite, and some distance from the other ground floor caves. No one ever came needlessly near to Jalana, who spoke to the gods.

She mumbled and muttered; the rhythmical sound was almost a chant. The others pretended not to listen. No one wanted to attract the stare of Jalana, for it could paralyze men or make women sterile. Jalana seemed like something long dead; it was as though all the life in the withered witch had concentrated in her eyes.

"We are starving," she droned. "Starving since the metal birds drove us from the high fertile mesa. Fire came from the sky, death comes from overhead, and the white skinned *nakhai* come with a new doom . . ."

The slant-eyed Yaqui women shivered. One snatched a child who was toddling toward the witch, and soundly boxed his ears. The dogs instinctively avoided Jalana. The children, however, had to be taught that when a curse was being woven, it was best to keep one's distance.

Jalana sang of the Golden Goddess who would come out of the lake to redeem the Yaquis from oppression and hunger. Once more the hills would be green with maize, and the woods alive with game. Jalana's wrath gripped those tight-lipped women. The pounding pestles sounded like the beating of war drums. First the Golden Goddess . . . then the slaying . . . then food for their children . . .

A tall man came from one of the caves. He rubbed his eyes, yawned and expanded his broad chest, flung back his gray hair. It was bobbed at the level of his ear lobes; wiry as a horse's tail, and bound with a band of red flannel that hid most of his forehead. Yacupaz, chief of the Wild Yaquis, did not go out to hunt any game less important than man. Short of war or emergencies, the sanctity of his position demanded his presence in camp.

Like a witch doctor, a chief is closer to the gods than other people. But once it seems that he no longer enjoys divine favor, he is deposed.

Yacupaz booted several children and a dog out of his way and stalked over toward Jalana. The old woman had ceased chanting, but continued to feed twigs and bark

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to the sacred fire that smouldered day and night in a niche in the pyramidal rock.

She looked up and croaked, "Last night I had a vision. The Lake of the Gods was red with blood, and fires were on every mountain."

"Chayoga?" he demanded. "What of Chayoga?"

She blinked, shook a long staff adorned with the rattles of many diamondbacks. "He's on the way. But I can't see where. Only blood is clear. Blood from the sky, and fire from the mountain."

Yacupaz said nothing. Jalana typified the mystery and riddle of women, who made magic and spoke to spirits and demons. He himself, a chief, personified the more active but less subtle half of nature. She would tell him when she knew, or when she pleased.

He squatted beside a drum that sat near the witch, and tried its head of tightly stretched human hide. The tension was right. Then he thumped with knuckles and finger tips, and sometimes with the heel of his hand.

The sound was sullen and deep. His finger tips made small, rubbing motions against the carefully stretched skin of a long dead enemy. The roaring ceased, when his nails *tick-tocked* like dancing feet. This was no telegraph code that spelled words. Each sound phrase expressed an elementary thought, very much as a picture writing does.

WHEN the shadow of the wall reached out over the edge of the *barranca,* hunters began coming into camp. Watchers however remained at their posts, ready for *nakhai* invaders.

The hunt had been the best in many days. The women were kindling fires. Others skinned the two deer that tall Istiqua and his companions had brought home. But all were to share the food; though Jalana and Yacupaz took first choice. The dogs snapped at entrails, or bits of gristle too tough for the women and children.

Later, the cooking fires became little red eyes in the gloom. Only Jalana's sacred hearth was fully alive. For years, it had been carried from camp to camp. It was the spiritual heart of a people who feared the malice of demons more than of men.

Yacupaz sat near Jalana, waiting for drums to sound, when his outposts brought him fresh word of the invaders. His men muttered in monosyllables to each other and smoked as they waited.

If they felt the growing tension, they did not show it. It was for Yacupaz and Jalana to think. The business of warriors was fighting. And that they did that incessantly was proved by the absence of old men. Few had lived to reach the age of forty.

A panther's scream came from the south, somewhere from the neighborhood of the trail that led from the floor of the mile wide barranca. Yacupaz cocked his head, listened for the cry to be repeated. There was silence. He frowned, then rose and gestured to his men.

They gathered about him. From the corners of their eyes they watched Jalana throwing aromatic herbs and bits of wood into her fire. They had nothing to say; her presence oppressed them, and they looked to Yacupaz for reassurance.

As the pungent fumes rose, Jalana's muttering became a shrill cry. One of the dogs pointed his muzzle at the moon and bayed. The rising wind whined among the jagged rocks. The witch woman, cunningly timing her ritual to those outside voices, began to sway from the waist, and gesticulate with her grimy talons.

"The deer are few, and worms eat the acorns. The *nakhai* come to rob us of what little remains. And last night the lake was red with blood, and the mountains were red."

She shook the rattle. "The Golden Goddess came to me in a vision. She will not rise from the lake until we slay the white looters. Without the blood of our enemies, she will turn her face from us, and our children starve."

"Where's Chayoga?" demanded Istiqua.

Jalana's giggle was malicious. "He loves the robbing *nakhai.* They have bewitched him."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

An owl hooted. The warriors shivered, drew their thin blankets about their shoulders. The screech of the *tecolotl* betokens death to some member of the tribe.

"Kill them first," Jalana croaked. "Then the Golden Goddess will drive all our enemies into the sea, and we go back to our mesas and valleys."

Repetition was having its effect on them. Yacupaz no longer waited for far-off drum beats. He beat his own drum; the sound brought echoes from every cavern mouth along the ledge.

The women herded their children into the caves. The unmarried girls came running with fuel which they heaped in the center of the plateau. They hurried back, eager to avoid Jalana, who hobbled forward. She had a brand from the sacred hearth. This she tossed into the heap of brush wood. Flames rose, and the men formed a circle about the fire.

In order of rank, each warrior gave his opinion; all but Yacupaz, whose word outweighed the tribe's.

"Go down and kill them!" Some added, "And Chayoga as well! He leads them."

"Get them tonight!"

"Chayoga's fault!" Jalana screeched. "Chayoga, the traitor!"

The wrathful cry leaped from mouth to mouth. Yacupaz raised his hand. When he finally won silence, he said, "Who stops to consider if we are ready for fighting? If we use all our cartridges killing the *nakhai,* how will we shoot deer? Who has a plan we can use?"

They had ambushed unwary traders and prospectors, these young men; but only Yacupaz and some older men fully understood the difficulty of fighting a well armed party.

For a moment Yacupaz held their attention. One spoke of a ravine in which Frayne could be trapped with rocks and logs hurled from above. And then Jalana's fanaticism whipped them to fresh fury.

They drew their weapons. The witch woman's frenzy had won over the chief's sober deliberation. "Lead us, Yacupaz!" they howled, "or we'll know you hate your people! Even if the Golden Goddess doesn't come, we'll get guns and food."

WAYLAND slept little during what remained of the night of Chayoga's disappearance. "That lad is slick. He runs out, only he'll loop back to bushwhack me and Herb," he reasoned as he stirred restlessly in his blankets. "Then a couple days later, he'll make an open appearance in camp and tell Frayne he has just returned from scouting around. That keeps Frayne from thinking Chayoga knifed two pesky guests."

But it was more than just suspicion and possible hidden danger which kept Wayland awake until rolling mists and the squawking of water fowl in the pool told that dawn was at hand. He was not quite convinced that Chayoga would be loyal to Frayne if loyalty were to involve a head-on clash with tribal tradition; for human nature has its limits.

When the sun rose over the Sierra, pots and pans clattered. Airan, the cook, had a brisk fire going. The smoke and the odor of coffee blended with the smell of cedar and fir.

At breakfast, Lorela said, "Well, the camp's not disappeared, and the porters are all here. Sour puss!"

Wayland snorted. "All right, all right. Anyway, I sat up all night, watching."

Keller came hobbling from his shelter. "Hey, wait a second! Cut me in on that grub! I'm through with this invalid stuff!"

Frayne considered one angle and another of the problem as he ate. He finally decided that the wisest thing to do was to wait for Chayoga to return. Wayland and Keller eyed each other, but said nothing; not until Frayne asked for an opinion.

"I've got my notions," Wayland said, "you've got yours. I hope you're right, but it looks lousy to me."

"I don't even work here," Keller cut in, "but I still say it stinks."

"You wouldn't go back, would you?" Lorela asked.

"I've run often enough not to be sheepish about it," Wayland answered.

"There are times," Frayne said, "when

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

retreat is the only sensible thing. But this is not one of them."

"So you're staying?"

Frayne began to load his pipe. "I am."

Wayland rose. "If you don't mind, I'll use your field glasses for a moment."

Without waiting for an answer, he picked the binoculars from their case. The early mists had cleared, and the sun was reaching further into the deep barrancas. Wayland shaded the objectives, then searched the gorge of the Rio Yaqui. Not far ahead, it branched.

Sunrise had given him the distinct impression of country at least half-familiar. It was not any individual feature that stood out. It was rather the succession of plateaus, some narrow and short, others perhaps half a mile wide and a dozen in length. Finally he picked a tree whose lightning-blasted trunk had reached out of the gloom. He'd seen that before; he and Keller had camped near it.

"I'm with you," he said, lowering the binoculars.

"That's good."

"More than that. Instead of staying here and waiting, let's march on. That way, when Chayoga returns, he'll meet us all the sooner. The country ahead is familiar. I recognize it."

"What you mean," Frayne asked, "is that we've reached a point where your old line of retreat crosses this new route? That we've come so near the Lake of the Gods that every trail leads to or from it?"

"Correct. That Y ahead must be where the Rio Moctezuma and Rio Bavispe join to make the Rio Yaqui. Judging from the short time it took the Yaquis to come out of cover to nail me and Keller, their village —Chayoga's destination, if you ask me— must be close to the place where I made a forced landing."

"But why advance, when you were all set to retreat?"

"This camp isn't the place for a stay of several days. There's not enough grass for the animals. And we're so close to the water that we scare the ducks away, and the game. If we were further away, we'd have better hunting when they come in for their sunset drink."

"If Chayoga is going for a gang to knock us off," Keller pointed out, "there's no sense dashing up to meet them."

Wayland answered, "A day's march ahead, and we'll be in a place a lot easier to defend, if we have to. This camp is not so good. But if they tried to get us at the next stop, we could hold them off until we got some rafts slung together. Escape down the river. Like you and I did, only you don't remember."

Frayne conceded the soundness of Wayland's reasoning. "Chayoga did say that we'd better stay here until further notice, but it may never have occurred to him that we might have to retreat."

There was a good deal that Wayland could have added to *that*, but he tried to be fair minded. So he merely said, "Chayoga might be overestimating his influence with his relatives. That's what I had in mind."

IN SPITE of his protests, Keller was carried in a litter. Hobbling to breakfast was not evidence of enough recovery to march up mountain trails; though in a few more days, the burly photographer would be able, in a pinch, to use a rifle. This encouraged Wayland. And the recognition of landmarks left him feeling less at Chayoga's mercy. But the big event of the day was when he joined Lorela during the first halt to rest porters and pack animals.

"Don," she said quietly, "I'm trusting you for good," she said. "I'm sure of you now."

"So at last I get the breaks?" He tightened the cinch of her saddle. "What's the sudden logic? How come?"

"It's obvious that the Yaquis were out to finish you and Herb Keller. *They* certainly aren't working for Dennis and Ledgate. And neither can you be, or you'd hardly have found reasons for an advance, when Dad spoke of waiting for Chayoga to return."

"For once," he said, "feminine logic is absolutely perfect. Yaquis shooting at me,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Yaquis shooting at that punk who came back telling about finding my plane. But I think your intuition has gone wild. I'm still not sure but what Dennis might have a tie-in with the wild Yaquis."

"Why—Don, that's silly!"

He shrugged.

"Okay, it is silly. But look here. Chayoga thinks your dad is great. Chayoga sure as blazes tried to knife me. Because I work for Dennis? Well, maybe; but look here, honey—suppose Chayoga thought that some of his tribe might be selling out to my former bosses? Every other outfit in the world has disagreements, why wouldn't a tribe of Yaquis?"

Lorela frowned. "You mean that there might be a faction favoring Elmer Dennis, and dead set against Dad?"

"Why not? Aren't there lots of Yaquis in the army? You see, lots of them have weakened. They're falling for civilization. These fellows up in the Rio Bavispe country—that is, near the Lake of the Gods—they're the die-hards. And some of them may be weakening, listening to slick talk, taking bribes."

Her frown deepened as she placed a hand on his arm.

"Don't tell Dad. Trying to shake his trust in Chayoga doesn't do any good, and it just worries him. But there's one point where I think you're wrong."

Wayland rolled a corn-husk cigarette. "What's that?"

"If Elmer Dennis did have a strong group of Chayoga's tribe under control, there'd be no need of trying to kidnap me."

"That's gospel," Wayland had to admit. "Though nothing really *holds* water. Every way you figure it, there is something leaky."

Then the line ahead began to move again, and Wayland went back to see how Keller's litter was riding. There was a long and difficult march ahead. To get to the further rim of a *barranca* only a mile wide often required a ten-mile march; sometimes twenty or thirty to get to the other side of one of those deep gorges that seamed the Sierra Madre.

CHAPTER IX

THE RATTLESNAKE WAND

FOR the moment, Yacupaz did contrive to keep his tribe in hand; but he was troubled, for Jalana's influence had become stronger than he had ever imagined possible. He stood there, tall and wrinkled and scarred from old battles, and waited for a lull in the yellings.

"This white man who comes into the mountains is my nephew's friend, he bought him out of slavery." Yacupaz gestured. "Is that true, Baycurí?"

Baycurí, the *tamen* who had run from Frayne's camp the night of the attempt to knife Wayland, was broad and solid and pockmarked. His shirt and blue jeans and rawhide sandals made him conspicuous among the ragged *broncos*.

"That's true, Chief!" His long continued use of Spanish had finally made him speak his native dialect haltingly. "Chayoga has told me. This Frayne is a good man. Look at these new pants. We ate well, too. I hated to leave camp."

Yacupaz glanced from face to face. He still had control, but he was not sure how long he could hold it. In some of the other tribes, the women had taken charge, for with years of warfare, they outnumbered the men three to one. Matriarchy had come to the mountains. It might come to his tribe. Yacupaz knew that more than Frayne's life was at stake.

Jalana cackled and shook her rattlesnake wand. "He's almost forgotten our language! Do you call that greasy fellow a Yaqui?"

The witch's derision of Baycurí's speech had its effect. There was muttering on all sides. Soon there would be nothing left for Yacupaz but to walk into the hills, where no man can long survive alone. Jalana or some other woman would take his place. It had happened elsewhere, and it could happen here.

For himself, it made no difference. He had lived half as long again as the average Yaqui *bronco*. He had been a good chief, he had led many raids, and only great odds had brought his people to this barren ledge.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

For a woman to take his place would mock his office, and the blood of all those who had ever followed him to battle.

Their bones were scattered over all the Tepe Suene and far down into the lowlands on either side. Some were in the distant desert, fallen in Pancho Villa's wars. He, Yacupaz, had led them, and for a witch to take his place would be to mock the spirits of these brave men.

But the young men muttered and each moment showed less respect for his presence. To make a final appeal now . . .

Then the dozen village dogs began to bark. They rushed from the shadows and across the circle of firelight. A tall man walked among them, head high. He kicked the brutes that snapped at him. Each kick lifted a dog, spilled him end for end.

The men about the fire whirled, drawing knives. Some leaped for their rifles, others strung arrows. What the women screeched was lost in the confusion. The tall man came straight toward Yacupaz, and as though he did not see any of the others. Santana Chayoga had come back to his own people, and so cunningly that none of the outposts had seen him.

THOUGH Chayoga had been away a dozen years, Yacupaz recognized him. The kinsmen stolidly greeted each other, as though they had been seeing each other twice a day. Then Chayoga spoke to Baycurí, and to Istiqua, who had recognized him at once.

Chayoga's arrival broke Jalana's spell. No one paid any more attention to her until she cackled, "Chayoga, where is the enemy you are leading to your home?"

Yacupaz saw that Chayoga would not answer the witch, so he took his cue and asked, "Where are your friends?"

Chayoga had already sensed the rivalry between his chief and Jalana. He said to Yacupaz, "They are waiting for your permission to come closer."

"Tell us why you bring them." The chief was slowly stealing the spotlight by asking these questions; Chayoga understood the play, and stood ready to help block Jalana.

"Already, many of our young men take up Mexican ways. They are joining the army. Our tribe becomes weaker each year since we had to leave the big mesa."

He gestured. The moon had risen, and the tips of the peaks were gleaming. Beyond the eastern rim of the *barranca* was a succession of broad plateaus, and fertile terraces separated by thousand-foot drops. These almost inaccessible tables had furnished maize aplenty, until airplanes had driven the Yaquis away with bombs.

Chayoga knew all this, and he knew that the new regime sent no bombers, that it wished to do justice to the Yaqui; but these people had long memories and stubborn minds, and years must elapse before they could imagine a government that did not butcher and enslave them. They had helped Pancho Villa win his revolt, and then the victors had betrayed and looted their mountaineer allies.

Chayoga said, "This man is not like the others. We should learn how to use the gold there is in these mountains. He will show us how it will get us liberty, food, guns, clothing."

Yacupaz had his own doubts, but he concealed them, for this well fed young man was helping him steal the show from Jalana. "That is good, Chayoga, but do you believe that this man can carry out his honorable intentions?"

"I would not be here if I did not." He stripped off his shirt. "Has he whipped me? Do you see any fresh scars on my back? Do I look hungry, can you see my ribs too plainly? Would he trust me in these mountains if he had ever harmed me?"

The young trouble-makers were impressed, and this pleased Yacupaz. He knew when to stop, so he said, "Now eat, and then we will dance."

Women came from the caves to bring venison, cakes of maize, and acorn meal fried in bear's fat. As Chayoga ate, and pretended to relish the unpalatable stuff he once had considered sound food, Yacupaz said, "Your people are safe, for the time, but they must not leave the camp where

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you told them to stay." He lowered his voice. "My young men are a lot of hotheads, looking for plunder. If your friends move closer, I can't protect them."

"They won't leave."

"That is good. Before they come nearer, the tribe must become accustomed to them."

"I understand that." And Chayoga did; more completely than he cared to admit. He knew already that his uncle was on trial, and that Jalana was using Frayne's party as a means of forcing a tribal issue.

Chayoga was thinking, "Jalana used to tend to her business, making magic. Now she has changed, and there is more to this than there seems. After all these years, why is she so ambitious against Yacupaz?"

He asked the chief, "Have any *mansos* come into the hills recently—I mean, excepting Baycurí?"

Yacupaz' eyes narrowed just a little. "Yes. A half-Yaqui came up, trading. He gave Jalana a few presents. He said he'd been working in the pearl fisheries for a *gachupín* named Ybarra. Why do you ask?"

"I do not know," Chayoga blandly answered. "But I think it would be well to kill this man if he comes up again."

Yacupaz somehow managed to smile behind his blank face, with no change in his eyes or about his straight mouth. He nodded, slowly. "You are very polite to an old man, Chayoga. You pretend not to have seen anything, but I think you have seen all.

"Frayne saved you from slavery that kills any Yaqui. Tonight, you have kept him from sure death, for I could not have held those fellows much longer. Your getting here when you did took their minds off turning against me."

"No, uncle. You are their chief."

"A tree grows, and when it is big, it falls. For sixty years, I have talked to the gods, and when a man becomes big, the gods cut him down. That is the way of the gods and it is well. You are my brother's son, so you must come back, and be chief in my place when it is time."

Chayoga was silent longer than courtesy demanded. Yacupaz went on, "Look, boy. You have paid your debt to Frayne. Tonight, you are free."

"I am no trader, uncle, no more than you are."

"No, do not abandon him. Get him safely home again. When he owed you nothing, he was generous. You cannot do less for him, now that you owe him no more. But then you can come back, and they will follow a young man, where they might otherwise serve a witch woman."

Chayoga thought on all these things as he ate the acorn meal soaked in bear's grease. The mess choked him almost as it might a white man; acorns, soaked in wood ash lye, then boiled, and pounded to a coarse meal. No lowland peon ate anything half as offensive.

CHAPTER X

SCREAM LIKE AN EAGLE

THE more Chayoga saw of his people the following day, the more he realized how their warlike spirit was gradually exterminating them. The pride that had preserved them against all odds and all invaders had become their doom.

This squalid nest of caves overlooking a narrow mesa; these haggard women, these half starved, pot-bellied children—either home had changed during his absence, or else his tastes had. While the buzzing flies, the stench of refuse, and his unwashed kinsmen did not offend him as they would an outsider, he was nevertheless conscious of the difference between these hardshell Yaquis and the people of the coast.

Chayoga had the Indian's stoical indifference to his surroundings. The vermin of the camp was no more than an annoyance, yet his years of service with Gilbert Frayne made him aware of the contrast. As the day wore on, this homecoming worried him.

His boyhood friends squatted about him. They had brought in enough game the preceding day, and Chayoga's reports on the seacoast world came under the heading of important tribal business. Thus all the men listened, except two feeble fellows who had

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to beat a small tomtom. This music set the pace for the women who pounded maize and acorns.

Other women came up the steep path with bundles of reeds or saplings. Whenever the maize patch or meal grinding or mending ragged garments did not keep them too busy, they went down into the *barranca,* and to the margin of the Lake of the Gods for material for huts. Few Yaquis would willingly live in the caves abandoned by the extinct aborigines; only immediate necessity, such as a violent storm, made them venture into the gloomy tunnels of the Ancient People whose feet had worn a deep channel into the rocky descent from ledge to lake.

Chayoga noted these details as he talked. He saw also that the faces of his fellows remained blank, yet he sensed that he had set them thinking. In the hands of an honest operator, the lost Tiopa Mine would redeem his people from squalor and starvation. More than that, it would keep them unified, and keep them from going into the lowlands to become "civilized"—neither Mexican nor Yaqui.

Istiqua said, "That is all good. But we all know that the Lake of the Gods is forbidden. We could have killed those two flying men, but they landed on the in-curving side of the lake, and so we were afraid to touch them. The one who jumped before the metal bird came to earth—that was different, so we tried for his hide. I do not think it is well to let anyone get too near the lake, O Chief!"

Yacupaz had a ready answer: "We will not go near the lake. If the gods curse the white men, that is their lookout. Our gods will not harm us if we mind our business and stay away."

Jalana's ears were sharp, as Chayoga judged from her malicious grin when she got up from the sacred fire, and hobbled toward the cave. She had no fear of the Ancient People and made a big point of preferring their abanded homes: which of course proved that she had supernatural powers.

The witch stooped over a jar that was just visible from the outside, and stirred the contents. A familiar reek billowed out, for she was brewing a batch of *tizwin* from yucca stalks. Now she uncovered the mess, and exposed it to heat and air so that it would ferment faster. When fresh, it was a pleasantly tart drink, but when ripe, it had a foul odor, and a quart would craze the stoutest drinker.

"The old hag ought to be killed . . ." Chayoga's association with Frayne had not wiped out his superstition, yet the thought cropped up, again and again, during that debate with Yacupaz and Istiqua and the others. "If someone killed Jalana, I could easily make things safe for my *patrón.*"

CHAYOGA, however, did not want that task, for killing men was one thing, and settling a witch woman was something else. Much of the drudgery that made a hag of a Yaqui girl before she was fairly grown was the result of the superstitious reverence with which savages regarded women.

A man, for instance, could not till a maize patch, for the grain either would not grow at all, or the crop would be poor. Simply because woman typified the maternal aspect of nature, she had to tend the cornfield, or else the seeds would perish. The wisest man could not quite understand her, hence she was feared.

"We will dance tonight," Yacupaz said, after another look at the strips of venison that hung out to dry. "Then we will vote."

Later, when the shadow of the Sierra reached across the mesa, and chill followed on its heels, the women fed the cooking fires. Chayoga said, "Gold will buy many blankets."

Yacupaz fingered the threadbare homespun he had drawn about his shoulders. He saw the point of that argument. But Chayoga was far from sure of his ground. The hotheads were holding their peace, for they saw no sense in offering premature objections that would lay them open to sound arguments.

From afar, drums began to mutter. A scout was reporting the advance of strangers.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Yacupaz eyed Chayoga, but said nothing until later, when they gathered near Jalana's pyramidal rock. Then he whispered, "That is bad. Your *patrón* is making a new camp."

Chayoga was sure that Wayland had persuaded Frayne to move on, but now there was no chance of going to warn him, for Chayoga's first hasty move would be interpreted as treachery, and Frayne would be attacked.

Jalana had heard the drums, and she was happy. She fed aromatic herbs to her fire. Swaying from the waist, she muttered, gestured; then her voice became shrill as the cold wind that swept down from the summit, and scattered ashes over the Yaquis crouched about the fire.

Chayoga knew that the hag was singing legends of her own invention, for Frayne had told him the origin of the Golden Goddess tradition: a rehash of the Quetzalcoatl legend of the Aztecs, or perhaps it had come from Panama, a many times twisted tale of the goddess whose golden image Balboa had hunted in Dobaybe.

But for all that borrowed knowledge, Chayoga was uneasy as he watched the younger men. His fears were doubled, for this Golden Goddess talk could set them on the warpath. No telling what they would do if they saw Lorela's copper-colored hair. He wondered if Jalana had this legend because of advance knowledge of Lorela.

"They treated Chayoga well," Jalana cackled. "See the red sash and those fine boots. See how well fed he is. They are rich. They have food. Food we can take by night."

Her voice dropped to a hoarse whisper. The powder she flung into the fire made a quivering blue flame. Its fumes stung eye and nostril.

"Why trade with them when the Golden Goddess is on her way? Can those who come into the hills in metal birds ever be our friends?"

Yacupaz looked older than ever, and weary. He had called for a vote: and the drum message that told of Frayne's advance left him little doubt as to the decision of his people. Nor could he call for a second delay.

Vote it had to be. He rose, stepped from the circle. One by one, the men were to file toward him, passing by the chief's right or left, according to the choice.

"Wait!" Chayoga's command checked the first warrior. "There is more to say. The tribe is more important than the men. We live today because each acted for the common good. How many of us are left? War against the *nakhai* has not increased our numbers. We kill one of them, they kill ten of us. If war had been wisdom, there would be many of us."

Someone said, "Better be dead than be slaves. Are we cowards?"

Chayoga accepted the challenge. "We have been fools, and we starve. We need a new wisdom to give strength to our old valor."

"He speaks well!" Pesuz' voice was deep and solemn. "We have killed our tribe. What once was wisdom has now become folly. Listen to Chayoga. He has lived among them. Is he a slave, or is he a free man? From a distance, he sees us more clearly than we see ourselves. We have been children, using a short measure."

THAT stirred them. Their faces did not change, they did not speak; but Chayoga could feel that his comrades now accepted him and his new ways. One by one, they filed past. Only a few dissented; these were mainly young hotheads who had never had a chance to distinguish themselves in raids.

Then Yacupaz said, "We will welcome these people, as long as they respect our customs. They will live on the mesa on the further side of the lake."

Chayoga, however, was not certain that the issue was closed. Jalana was shaking with malicious laughter. She spat at him, and the darkness of her cave echoed with her cackling.

Someone should kill Jalana before she thought of a trick to ruin the night's good work. So Chayoga thought as he went to join the dancers who were gathering about

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the fire, midway down the mesa. But disposing of her was definitely a woman's task.

The men began to strip for the dance; all, that is, except several veterans who were to beat the tightly stretched drums. Lean and bronzed, gleaming in the firelight, they formed in two opposing ranks.

Yacupaz flung back his gray hair, and screamed like an eagle. The drums roared, roll on roll, a steady rumbling that shook Chayoga like repeated thunder. When he set a pair of deer's antlers on his head and lashed them to his brow, the days he had spent with white people seemed far off and strange.

The drums mumbled, tattled, shouted till the hills answered. Then a slow measure came from the rumbling, and Yacupaz again screamed like an eagle swooping home.

The dancers pranced in imitation of a stag in flight. The ranks met, bodies and heads held rigid to balance the heavy antlers. Only their legs moved. And now Yacupaz no longer called his signals. The pounding drums spoke for him, and each dancer bounded back to his first position.

In spite of himself, the exaltation of the stag dance gripped Chayoga. This was no festival; it was a religious ritual in honor of the beast whose flesh had kept his people from starvation. This was deep in his blood; the click-clash of antlers, the sharp intake of breath, the sweat-gleaming bodies of his comrades who stared into the far darkness as they moved, not individuals but parts of a whole—the tribe.

Chayoga's tribe. The people whose welfare hinged on the decision to admit Frayne into Yaqui Land. Long after fatigue should have made them drop, they danced on. The drums commanded them, and they moved, statuesque and rigid. They had blended in a tribal soul; one stern, tough spirit trained to outwit and outrace the stag.

YACUPAZ shouted above the music. The drummers ceased beating the tightly stretched skins. The dancers reeled and sagged. Some sank to the ground, exhausted now that the hypnotism of the drums let them be aware of their bodies. Other fumbled clumsily with the bands that fixed the antlers to their heads. Some moved like sleep walkers, uncertainly seeking their huts.

The fire had died. Chayoga found his shirt and blanket. He was beginning to learn once more what it meant to be a Yaqui. His tribe had taken him back. He was more nearly one of them than he had dreamed possible.

He was glad, yet he was uneasy, remembering Jalana's laughter. As he stretched out in his cave, it reechoed in his ears.

But Jalana croaked and cackled at all hours. Chayoga had other things to consider. Frayne's rash move worried him. Maybe it had been smoothed over. He was weary from the dance, and so were the trouble-makers.

Then he heard another voice. And Jalana was answering. She was warning several men to be quiet. The echoes of her cave, and the tricks of the wind made everything uncertain. It was premonition, not understanding that brought Chayoga upright.

He crept toward her cavern. Far in its depths was a light. When he reached its mouth, he began to understand.

That thing which he had feared most was happening.

Half a dozen of the dissenters squatted around the old hag and her earthenware jar. A gourd passed swiftly from hand to hand. They were drinking *tizwin*. She could hardly keep them quiet, but she was giving them more.

Each was armed. Chayoga could not understand the thick muttering, but there was no doubt that they were getting up courage to defy Yacupaz. The witch woman was egging them on to take the trail.

Prudence checked Chayoga before he had advanced more than a few yards. Yacupaz and the elders should deal with them. That would keep it from becoming a personal issue.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He turned. He had scarcely thrust his head outside the low entrance when Jalana's laugh mocked him. A cord suddenly drawn taut tripped him. As he lurched forward, a club knocked him to his knees.

There had been no warning.

The blow stunned Chayoga. Strong hands pinned him while others stuffed his mouth with dirty rags and lashed him with buckskin thongs. Too late, he realized that Jalana had made just enough noise to trick him into a trap. With the shrewdness of the half mad, she had expected him to lie awake, pondering on Frayne's peril and waiting for a chance to warn him before trouble broke out.

And that, of course, was just what he had done.

The drunken Yaquis carried him far back into the cave. Jalana said, "Now go, and do what is to be done."

Their answering grunts left no doubt as to the work ahead. Jalana giggled, and as the raiding party crept from the cave, she knelt beside Chayoga.

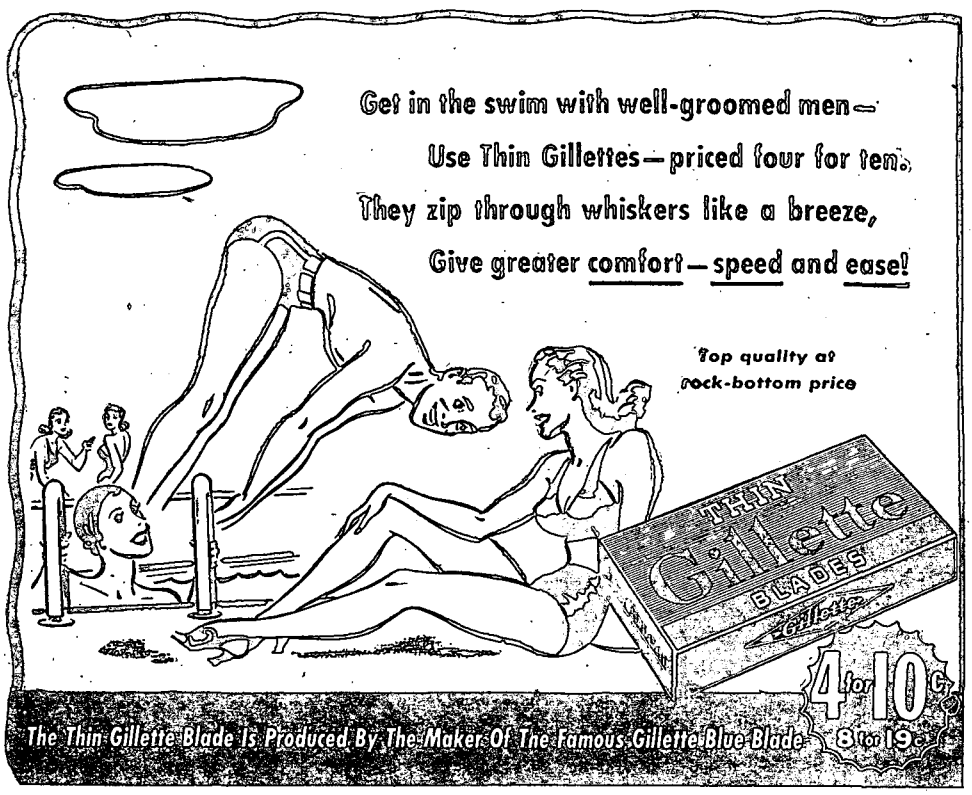
"Stop wiggling, young man!" she mocked. "You can't get loose. And you won't rule the tribe after Yacupaz is gone."

His gag kept him from answering, but even if his mouth had been free, there would not have been anything to say, for once a group defied a chief, that man's rule was ended.

"The Goddess will rule, for men have driven the tribe to ruin," Jalana whispered. "We need the wisdom of the Golden Goddess."

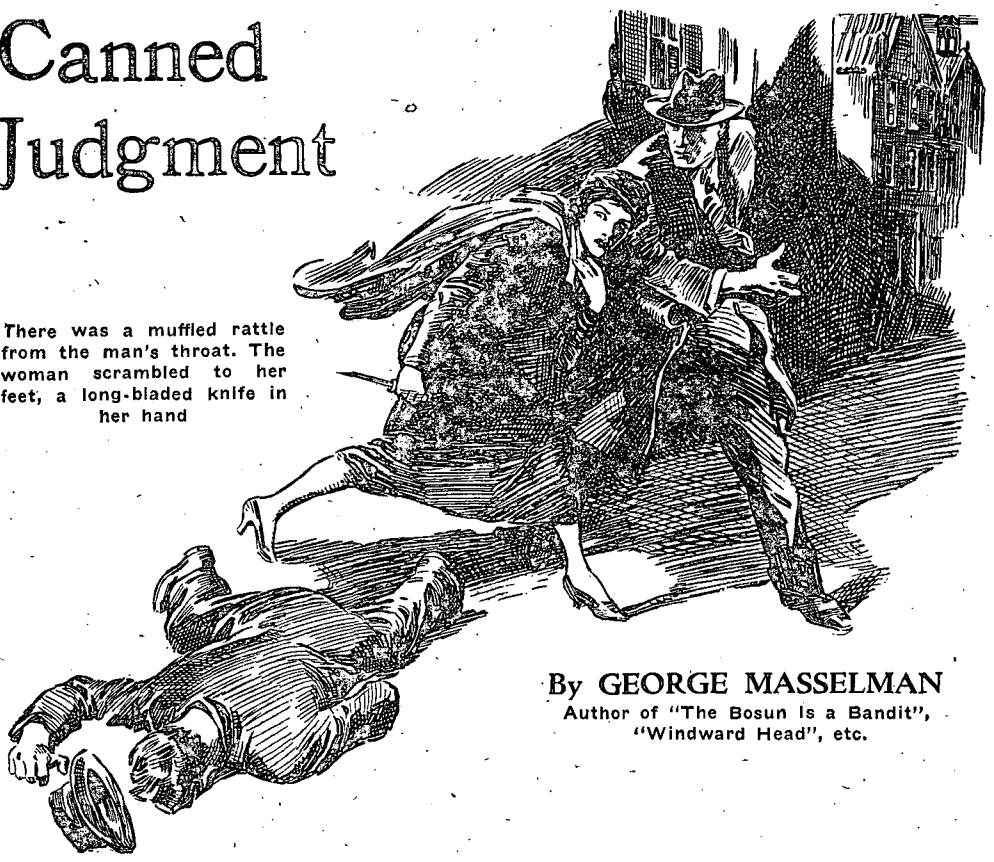
And this, Chayoga knew, was only another way of saying that Jalana would rule in place of Yacupaz. Nothing could stop that, or save Frayne; for there was little chance of escaping in time to warn his friends.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK


Get in the swim with well-groomed men—
Use Thin Gillettes—priced four for ten.
They zip through whiskers like a breeze,
Give greater comfort—speed and ease!
Top quality at rock-bottom price
THIN Gillette BLADES
4 for 10¢
8 for 19¢
The Thin Gillette Blade Is Produced By The Maker Of The Famous Gillette Blue Blade

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Canned Judgment



There was a muffled rattle from the man's throat. The woman scrambled to her feet, a long-bladed knife in her hand

By GEORGE MASSELMAN

Author of "The Bosun Is a Bandit", "Windward Head", etc.

It may not be the policy of the British government to disclose the number of U-boats sunk; but the ubiquitous Mr. Lamson knows now what happened to a lot of them

THERE was more to the trawler than the eye did meet . . . Mr. Lamson chuckled to himself. For one thing the wireless equipment was a heap too good for a mere fishing boat; it was better, in fact, than many an outfit he had worked with in his days.

Also he had an assistant, and that was another thing the venerable wireless operator had not often been blessed with.

He stood at the railing, bracing himself against the pitching deck. He felt some jars against the bow and a bit of spray hit his face in the darkness.

The shore lights were slipping astern as the mouth of the Thames widened into the North Sea. He wondered what they were up to this time. Not sweeping. The paravanes and kites had not been laid out, and besides, you could not sweep at night—a waste of time and good trawlers.

Mr. Lamson wondered whether their passenger had something to do with their mission. That passenger who had come on aboard at the last moment, slipping out from behind the fishwharf and jumping to the deck, disappearing at once into the tiny messroom.

He counted on Captain Crice to give him the lowdown, as soon as they were out at sea. The old man was pretty decent about that sort of thing, especially considering the fact that Mr. Lamson was an American and always ready, at the drop of a hat, to make it clear that he was taking no sides in this war.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

That's what he had told Captain Crice when that lime-juicing skipper had asked him to come along to England. But Captain Crice, smoothing down a newspaper, had said: "See that headline? 'Neutrality Bill Passed'."

"So what?" Mr. Lamson had said. "I'm not interested in politics."

"It's going to lay up half the American ships. They are already appropriating money for a dole for those that'll have to be beached."

"You mean I got to go on the dole?"

"If you hang around much longer," the other had said significantly.

It had settled the issue and together they had arrived in England where Mr. Lamson, being vouched for by Captain Crice, promptly found himself being mustered into the Royal Naval Reserve with the rank of Senior Wireless.

For some months they had been sweeping, wearing out one whole trawler and the stern of another. But lately the *B 47 X* had been in port more often than not and Captain Crice had been absent for days on end.

So far Mr. Lamson had not found out much about those excursions.

HE FELT his way along the railing. They were running without lights and the portholes had been darkened. The *B 47 X* started to act up in earnest now as she took the scud on her port cheek.

Going forward he reached the deckhouse under the bridge just before the first chunk of solid water came overboard. Nimbly he negotiated the high doorstep, pulling the heavy iron door shut behind him.

For a moment he stopped at his door, looking inside through the airvent. Mr. Stockley, his number two, was at the earphones. He saw him look at the portrait of a young woman and a child, which had been tacked against the wall. Mr. Lamson did not disturb him and moved on.

On the other side of the deckhouse, separated by a messroom, Captain Crice had his small quarters, a single cabin. Entering the tiny cabin Mr. Lamson saw their passenger sitting at the table, his head between his hands, steadying it against the heaving and rolling of the trawler. The man seemed seasick. Perhaps he was no sailor, Mr. Lamson thought.

"Stick your nose outside," the old wireless operator suggested, touching him on the shoulder. The man raised his head; his face was ashen gray. "No good staying indoors when you are sick," Mr. Lamson urged. The other looked at him in a state of abject misery but made no move.

Mr. Lamson shook his head. If they took no advice they were in a bad way; nothing so demoralizing as being seasick.

In the old man's cabin the mate was asleep which meant that the captain was on the bridge. Mr. Lamson, pulling up the collar of his greatcoat, went back the way he had come, waiting at the door until the sea had threshed itself to death at the scuppers; then he made a quick dash for the bridge.

He fairly bumped into Captain Crice, who stood hunched at the railing, his eyes on a level with the top of the weather cloth which was stretched the length of the bridge.

"What's in the wind?" Mr. Lamson asked, without taking his eyes off the seething blackness ahead.

"A north wester, but she's blowing herself out," the captain said, ignoring Mr. Lamson's thirst for information. "She's busted the convoys all to smithers and I bet the U-boats took advantage of it."

Mr. Lamson realized that he had been rapped on his fingers but he was not the person to allow that to go unchallenged.

"What'd the King say?" he asked casually.

"The King?"

"Sure. Don't tell me he hasn't asked for you yet. It seems to me that was the least he could have done, seeing you sank that U-boat for him." Captain Crice laughed softly, remembering a little thing

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he had done off Trindad. More water came over and both ducked when they saw the spume raise itself above their heads.

"That was just a break I got," the sailor said without pride. "I was lucky."

"The hell you were. You worked it up for months, making believe you were going to fuel their U-boats."

"Planning something for a few short months? What does that amount to? You should hear some of the stories they tell me."

"Who?"

"Oh . . . the people I see occasionally in London."

"You mean the *Intelligence.*"

The captain looked at him sideways. His low chuckle became audible in the darkness.

"How'd you guess?" he said. "I never told you those were the people I went to see."

"You didn't have to," Mr. Lamson countered. "I have eyes and ears, don't I? What are the stories they tell you?"

"If you think that a couple of months is anything then how would you like to hear of a fellow who had been waiting to strike for over forty years?"

"Cripes!" Mr. Lamson exclaimed. "That's a long time. Who is he?"

"A Pole by the name of Potowski; a count or something. He has been out to avenge Poland ever since he was old enough to hear how Germany and Russia divided up his country in the old days. He did intelligence work for Japan when she was fighting Russia years ago.

"When Germany started building an army and a fleet, around 1910, he came through again, telling us, the British. In the last war he was right on his toes, working out of Germany, and the Office gave him a number—*seventeen*—which meant they were counting on him. But no one ever saw him."

"I suppose he cashed in when Poland regained her independence?" Mr. Lamson asked.

"That's what the Office thought because no one heard from him for years. And then, just when they were going to give his number to somebody else, that Hitler fellow started his funny business with Poland—and there he was again, tipping us off what the Nazis were doing.

"But this time the Office was skeptical and there were some who held that he was a Gestapo man and that the Nazis were using his channel in order to fool us. It sure looked that way—until after Scapa Flow."

"What do you mean? When the U-boat went in and sank that big battleship?"

"Yes," Captain Crice said, "only it so happened that Seventeen had sent word that this *was* going to happen. We had practically the date and the hour."

"HOLY Moses." Mr. Lamson whistled though his teeth. "But he got sore because they didn't believe him."

"I guess so," Captain Crice admitted. And after a little he said, "We have to bring that passenger to Holland and hang around there for a few days."

"He's pretty seasick," Mr. Lamson said. "He was moaning when I came up."

"Seasick? Impossible! He's a lieutenant in the Navy."

"Well, if he ain't seasick then something has scared the pants off him. His bile was right up in his face."

"Maybe he has reasons to be scared," Captain Crice said thoughtfully. "I don't know but that he might. He's supposed to make contact near the border; and others before him found themselves in the clutches of the Gestapo when they expected to meet one of their own men.

"If he feels his mission isn't on the level then no wonder he is scared. There's nothing those Nazis won't do to make a man talk. Maybe I better go down and cheer him up." He blew a whistle and ordered the mate called out.

Lamson decided to turn in and get a few hours sleep before having to take over. Stockley looked up when he entered.

"There is something going on," the younger man said. "They changed the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cipher, right in the middle of ordering thirty more destroyers. Now, why do you think they did that?"

"Don't ask me," Mr. Lamson said, shrugging his shoulders. He entered the little cabin off the wireless shack and stretched out on the settee with all his clothes on. It wasn't healthy to take them off, not in the North Sea.

He was tired and the violent straining of the trawler did not keep him awake. He was dreaming of that fellow Potowski, seeing him sore at the Admiralty for not listening to him. . . . Right in the middle of it, Stockley woke him.

"Midnight, sir," he said. "You told me to call you."

"Sure, I'm all rested," Mr. Lamson said, jumping to his feet. "If you'll let me get some coffee I'll be right with you."

He went out into the dark alley, feeling his way to the door of the messroom. Opening it gave him some light to see by. The lieutenant was gone. It looked as if someone had spilled some coffee, right where he been had sitting.

But then he suddenly noticed that it stayed where it was, regardless of how the ship pitched. Narrowing his eyes he moved forward, holding out a probing finger. Before he so much as touched the spot he knew that it was blood, coagulated against the scarred table top.

He looked closely, bending his hand sideways so as not to get into the light. There was no doubt about it. Some one had been bleeding.

Looking up he met the brooding stare of Captain Crice who stood in his doorway, one elbow against each side, steadying himself.

"HE'S dead," he said. "I knew he was going to do it. It was the best way out so I let him go ahead."

Mr. Lamson blinked, knowing that he was talking about the lieutenant who had preferred to kill himself rather than go on his mission.

"Sit down," the captain continued, "we've got to talk this over."

"I came for some coffee," Lamson said lamely.

"Go ahead, have some. Bring me a cup too, and wait—" He entered the pantry and took a wet rag. "There's no need sticking our elbows in it," he said, wiping the table. Mr. Lamson brought the two cups and for a short while they sat silently, sipping at the coffee.

"Stockley says they changed the cipher," Mr. Lamson remarked, just for the sake of saying something, "and thirty more destroyers were ordered up."

"I know," Captain Crice answered. "It's all tied up together."

He pointed over his shoulder to the cabin where the foot of the dead lieutenant appeared around the doorpost. He bent his head confidentially and his voice was hardly above a whisper; an involuntary measure because the ship nor the sea could have ears sharp enough to hear more than their own infernal din as they battled each other in the storm.

"The whole fleet is moving up. It seems the Admiralty received word from Germany that U-boats, now at sea, may experience some trouble on board—day after tomorrow. If it is true they will be an easy mark for our destroyers."

"Sounds too good to be true. What is that trouble supposed to be?" Lamson wanted to know. "Hardening of the arteries?"

"I don't know," Captain Crice admitted, "but you are right, it may be a trap. The Office has it doubts too and that's why they sent *him* over. If his report had been favorable our whole fleet would go into action. But, if we heard nothing"—he moved his hand across his throat in an eloquent gesture—"we could still withdraw to our bases."

"How was he to let us know?"

"There is a radio available in Germany. That was the reason they picked him—he knew wireless." The captain sat back, staring into his empty cup.

"They should pick a fellow who'd get cold feet at the last moment. What a mess!" Mr. Lamson looked resentfully at

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the dead foot which had slipped halfway off the settee.

"That's one privilege every man has," the captain said generously. "All we can do is send somebody else. Will you talk to Stockley, or shall I?"

"Stockley? What do you mean?" Mr. Lamson spluttered. "The chap is married; he's got a child."

Captain Crice easily met his eyes.

"There are millions of men with families. The Admiralty is ready to gamble its fleet and a hundred thousand good men; Stockley ought to be willing to risk *his* neck."

Captain Crice raised his big frame out of the chair. "We'll be getting into port by daylight. There is a train out of Amsterdam which will bring him to the north of Holland. There's where he will contact his man and cross the border. Every one of our ships will be tuned in on his report."

He turned away but at his door he stopped. "I give you until six to tell Stockley; otherwise I will. In the meantime I'll push the body overboard and make an entry in the logbook: 'Killed in the line of duty!' I'll do that much for his family."

Lamson relieved Stockley, who made no bones about being tired and quickly stretched himself on his bunk, went to sleep.

Tuned to the ether, Lamson kept staring at the picture of the young woman and the child she had in her arms. She was not a really pretty woman, but she became more beautiful the longer he looked at her.

Once or twice he swore under his breath. The air was chockful of signals and he sensed the movement of many ships creeping up, in order to be on hand for that signal—if it would ever come.

AT FOUR he awakened Stockley, and then went in search of Captain Crice, found him on the bridge. The storm had let up a bit and they were taking over less water.

"We'll be entering the fishing port," Captain Crice volunteered. "Offically we're running in for a cargo of fish. We'll be there in two hours." And then he said what he really had on his mind, "Did you tell him?"

"No," Mr. Lamson said.

"All right," the captain said icily, "then I'll do it."

"You don't have to. I'll go instead."

"You? Why you fool Yank! You have no business in this war."

"I know, but I always was a sucker for sentiment. Anyway, I'm going. Moreover, you English may have your faults, but I like you better than those Nazis."

"All right," the skipper said finally, clearing his throat. He proceeded to give details: where to go and how to act in order to make contact.

"You are to find out just what's causing those U-boats to surface in daylight. And you have to make sure that you are face to face with one of our own people and not a Gestapo man. When you are convinced this is no trap you give the word. Use these letters: A-B-C-D-E." He opened his left hand. "The first five letters of the alphabet."

"You don't say," Mr. Lamson observed.

"And remember," the captain went on, "those letters have to come through at forty a minute. Can you send that fast?"

"What do you think I am, an apprentice?"

"Well, you better practice up on a dead key."

"I won't have to," Mr. Lamson said, feeling insulted. "And what do I do when this fellow turns out to be a—German?" he added slowly.

"Then you won't do a thing," the captain said. "Others will do it for you."

"Sure enough," Mr. Lamson agreed, chewing his words. "That little matter had almost slipped my mind."

The lights from the fishing port swept the horizon; a small segment at first, to grow higher and wider as they pulled closer.

"Who do I get in touch with?" Mr.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Lamson asked finally, betraying what he had been thinking about. "Any name or description?"

"No; just Seventeen."

"Seventeen? That's Count Potowski!"

"That's what they say," Captain Crice admitted.

IT WAS dark when Lamson got off the train and walked through the quiet streets of the almost medieval town.

He dropped into a store to buy the cigars he was supposed to have as part of the set-up. He pointed at a box, not knowing what to ask for in Dutch; but the storekeeper took just one look at him and immediately addressed him in English.

Lamson fervently hoped that the Nazis would not be quite as adroit if he ran into one.

Briskly he walked along, having been told how to reach the restaurant he was to go to. The narrow street was sparsely lighted, but there was a waning moon riding high through a torn filament of clouds. The storm has blown herself out, he thought, wondering whether it was good omen or bad.

The *Noordsche Kroon* was crowded, thick smoke rising toward the ceiling and staying there, while below it, around tables, men sat talking, elbows crooked and fingering their glasses of gin.

Most of the activity seemed centered around a large table which was covered by a profusion of magazines and newspapers. Not all the people there were reading, however, and Mr. Lamson saw several who were engaged in some kind of business transaction, exchanging papers and making notes.

They were not all men; and at one end of the table he noticed a frail, prim-looking woman, perusing some papers which a stolid Dutchman had just handed to her.

Mr. Lamson sat down; he was supposed to sit at that table. "Don't try to make out that you are a Dutchman or a German," Captain Crice had warned him; "you won't get away with it. You are an American and you are on business—your *own* business, if anyone should ask you."

Bearing those words in mind he reached for a much handled copy of *Life*. A waiter came up; Lamson ordered coffee, then broke out one of the cigars and carefully lighted it.

Slowly he turned the pages of the old issue of *Life*, but his ears were attuned to what went on around the huge table. Most of it was in guttural Dutch, but occasionally there was also German, soft and musical—especially when it was used by that gray-haired little woman at the end of the table.

From time to time he looked up, taking in the men and wondering who was the one he had to see . . .

When the ash on his cigar was about a half inch long, Lamson, seemingly absorbed in his magazine, cupped his hand and dropped the ash into it. Not until then did he transfer it to an ashtray. This, Captain Crice had told him, was the signal.

He repeated the process at periodic intervals, each time becoming conscious of an increased tension. He wondered how long this had to go on. Suppose Seventeen had given up hope that somebody was coming over? It might be lucky for him if he had.

But then the job would also remain undone . . . .

The waiter approached with a magazine in his hand, folded open at a page.

"Someone say you read this," he said in difficult English. Mr. Lamson looked at it in surprise. He couldn't make head or tail of the text. He looked up to see who might have caused this to be given to him but he failed to notice a single glance in his direction.

He studied the page again. Nothing clicked until, as through a fog, he noticed the number of the page. It was *Seventeen*.

He had not known this was going to be the answer, but now he no longer needed any prompting. He scanned the page as if he were reading it and, closing the magazine, put it back on the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

table. Now that he had made contact he was supposed to leave; everything else would follow by itself. Paying the check he left the restaurant and retraced the way he had come.

He walked slowly. For awhile no one caught up with him. Then he braced himself when he heard a car approach. It slowed down and pulled up at the curb. A gloved hand opened the door and Mr. Lamson slipped into the seat. It was the woman from the *Noordsche Kroon.*

THEY set out for the country, heading north. Not a word was spoken between them. In all its flatness the land stretched out, north toward the sea, east toward Germany.

Finally the car turned into a farm yard and the woman got out, pushing open a barn door before Mr. Lamson could so much as offer assistance. Then she was back again and drove the car inside.

"Come along," she said. Her English had a perceptible accent. They walked along a narrow dirt road, apparently into a void because there were no lights visible. The road went upwards a little and they stood on a huge dike, a body of water lapping its feet.

The opposite shore—if there was any—was lost in the darkness. Behind them the lights of the Dutch town faintly glowed in the sky.

She pointed across the water. "There is Germany," she said.

"Blacked out?"

"Yes." She descended the path, skirting the dike until they came to a few wooden piers, half covered by tall bushes. Alongside of one there was an open boat. She jumped on board and Mr. Lamson followed. There was a clear view in all directions.

"Is the fleet ready?" she asked.

"I can't tell you."

"I understand," she said with what sounded like a little laugh. "You have to make sure you're not dealing with the Gestapo. It would be simpler if you took my word for it."

It was Mr. Lamson's turn to show his scepticism.

"You want me to report that everything is on the up and up without having proof of it? It would hardly have been necessary for them to send me, in that case."

She did not answer but, instead, lifted the lid of a box and started the motor. He sat down beside her while she was steering.

"How soon do we meet Seventeen?" he asked as they got under way.

She dismissed the question with a wave of her hand. "Listen," she said, "as soon as we land we'll drive on to Bremen. There'll be a truck, loaded with stuff I have been buying in Holland for our firm—Schuler & Co.—during the past few days. To all appearance this is our business, provisions. We have been in it for years, never forgetting that we had to even a score. That score will be settled tomorrow."

"So I was told."

"Yes, the stage is set, whether or not your fleet is willing to co-operate. We couldn't wait any longer. It will happen on all the U-boats simultaneously. On every U-boat, no matter whether it has just left or is on its way back after three weeks of marauding. It is to happen tomorrow, after daybreak, when U-boats go into hiding below the surface."

"Mutiny?"

"No," she said. "No mutiny. This took years of planning, building a reputation to get into the navy yard. But even this long preparation could not be completely foolproof. If on one single U-boat, the—the trap is sprung before tomorrow—today for instance—then we may not be able to prove to you what you want to know—how and what we did."

"I must have proof," Mr. Lamson insisted. "Those are my orders." There was a painful silence.

"I am ready to give you that proof, if it is humanly possible. Have you a gun?" she asked suddenly.

"No," Mr. Lamson said, a chill running

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

down his spine. "What good would a gun do?"

"Not much, except you might put it against your temple in—in an emergency. But this is better; here, take it." She had reached inside her coat, and when he held up his hand she dropped something small and round into it.

"What is it?" he asked, fingering it gingerly.

"Poison," she said; "works in twenty seconds. Keep it where you can get at it quickly."

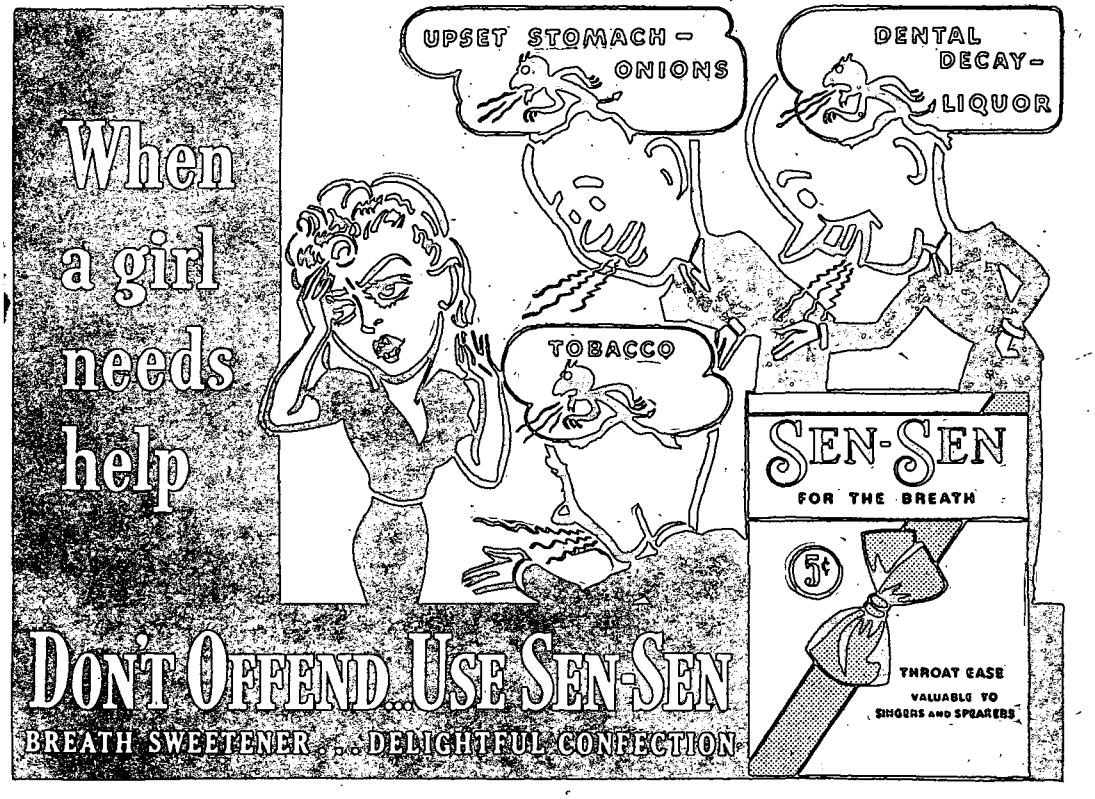
He fingered it some more and then dropped it into his vest pocket, feeling every once in a while to see whether it was still there. He was pursing his lips.

THERE was now around them a large sheet of rippling water, silvery and cold. The motor was throttled down, becoming only a soft purr. A dark line grew before the bow, lengthening the nearer they got to it. Lamson looked at the woman.

"Germany," she said. Now the motor was shut off and they slid into the bushes. She picked up a pole and nosed the boat in as far as she could. They had to jump three feet to get on a solid ground, she holding out her hand for him to catch her.

"Wait," she said, sensing the trembling of his hand. "There is nothing for you to be afraid of right now. Save it for later, after we have gotten to Bremen, to our warehouse where you will find the proof of our intentions—if it is not too late. There is a man on the truck but he will consider it quite common that I bring someone across for business reasons. So relax."

They walked on in silence, coming upon a road. After a while a black shadow blocked their way. It was the truck. A man stepped out of the shadows.



PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"*Guten Abend,* Fräulein Johanna," he said, taking off his cap.

"*Guten Abend,* Karl!" They climbed into the seat, the woman in the middle. Lamson, trying consciously to relax, realized that he was now driving through enemy land.

After a while he heard them talk to each other, the woman prompting the man with questions; and he wondered suspiciously whether she would tell him what they were talking about. There was no telling how near they were to the city which he supposed was hulking somewhere ahead in that black void which hung in front of their dim, blue headlights . . .

"People have been asking for me," she said suddenly in a whisper, putting her mouth close to his ear.

"People you know?"

In the darkness, she seemed to press closer to him, trembling. Then she drew away and sat up straight.

"No, strangers."

"Gestapo?"

She nodded her head. "We cannot drive into town now," she said. "It may not be safe. We'll have to walk."

After a few more words to Karl the truck drove into a narrow lane. While the German stayed with the truck, Mr. Lamson and the woman walked off. Occasionally she took his arm to guide him.

They were entering streets now, streets which were lined with warehouses and which had the smell of the waterfront.

The woman slowed up, walking practically on her toes and keeping to the deepest shadows of the warehouses. She had motioned Mr. Lamson to do likewise and he followed close on her heels.

He had the feeling that from each doorway, from every dark corner something might suddenly jump at him. He fumbled under his coat, seeking in his vest pocket. When his fingers touched the round pellet he withdrew them quickly.

He slowly gained an understanding of why the intelligence man had not dared go through with his mission. All around him there was no one to call upon if something was going amiss; he had only a frail little woman to depend on, and she still had to prove to him that she did not belong to the Gestapo herself.

HE ALMOST bumped into her when she halted at an intersection. With one arm stretched out behind her she carefully peered around the corner. And then she put both hands against the building; and it seemed to Mr. Lamson as if her slim shoulders sagged with some great weight.

Finally she moved back and straightened herself flat against the wall.

"What is it?" he whispered hoarsely. But all she did was to put her hands before her eyes and cry. He shook her elbow and as he did so a few tears fell on the back of his hand.

He left her to herself and moved stealthily to the corner. Half a block away he saw the outline of a building, another warehouse, cars standing in front of it, and men walking in and out with flashlights. And in the building too, there appeared dim lights behind the windows as if people were inside, searching. It was obviously a raiding party.

He felt himself being pulled back.

"Gestapo?" he asked.

"Who else?" she said, having regained her composure. She pulled him still further back into the shadows of a loading platform. Just around the corner he could hear the sounds of footsteps going back and forth and occasionally a curt order.

". . . They found out about Schuler & Co. They got there ahead of us and now it will be impossible for me to prove what we were leading up to all these years that we slowly built our reputation as ship-chandlers.

"Inside that building I could have shown you how we experimented with certain kinds of gas in tins which during the past few weeks were substituted for the tins of ham we regularly sold the U-boat fleet.

"And I could have shown you how we perfected certain acids with which those tins were coated; acids of various strength which would eat through the tin in from

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

three days to three weeks so that we could time the date on which every U-boat would suddenly become flooded with gas and be forced to the surface for air.

"And that day was set for tomorrow. Tomorrow after daybreak that gas will be liberated simultaneously in some twenty U-boats which are now on the open sea; we sent them those tins in our regular shipments of ham. But the British fleet must be there to meet them, otherwise little or nothing will be gained.

"Don't you believe me?" She was becoming more and more excited, pleading a case which was of more importance to her than life itself. She raised her voice.

"I am pleading with you! I beg of you to give the signal. Don't you see that we cannot go into the building now?"

Lamson stared off into the blackness around him. He realized his responsibility. Without proof of what Schuler & Co. had done, it could still be a trap which might cost the British an untold number of warships. Doggedly he shook his head.

"I must have proof," he said.

"Poor Poland!" This time it was practically a cry.

Sudden running footsteps neared the corner and a dark blur curved around it. It was almost upon them before it switched on a flashlight; but in the same moment Lamson, reacting upon the only thing that could momentarily save him, stuck out his foot.

The man fell flat on his face, shattering the light. And then Mr. Lamson saw something else: a body throwing itself through the air on top of the prostrated form on the ground. There was a low groan and a muffled rattle in the man's throat.

The woman scrambled to her feet, a long-bladed knife in her hand.

"HELP me," she whispered hoarsely, trying to pull at the legs. Of course, the body had to be put out of the way. It might give them just the necessary margin in case others started to look for their colleague.

Lamson got on his knees and rolled the limp body over and over until it was under the loading platform. Now the woman took him by the hand and they darted down the dark cavern of the street. He allowed himself to be led blindly. Around one corner they went and still another, slowing up at each and the woman peering ahead to see whether it was safe.

The blackout was helping them and they were far away before they heard a distant whistle. They came to what looked like a park, panting as if their lungs were ready to burst. He saw that it was a cemetery, once the woman led him off through the trees, past the tombstones of the dead.

"It is a shortcut out of town," she said, "and—I have yet something to do before I can leave for good."

They came to a bench and she motioned toward it. Gratefully he slumped; their dash for safety and the experience of seeing a man being stabbed to death had taken most of the starch out of him. A few feet away the ominous pallor of a marble slab showed itself vaguely.

Still shaking from the nervous strain, Lamson saw the woman strike a match. The tombstone took on definite proportions.

By the flickering light he saw his hands. There was blood on them, on the same hand where he had felt the warm trickle of her tears. He saw her face now. It was finely chiseled; and as she knelt it had an infinite kindness.

Could a woman cry one moment and kill a man in the next? A man she had never seen? Only if there was something tremendous at stake.

He tried to pull himself together. Who was this woman, anyway? And where in Heaven's name was Seventeen? . . . He saw the name on the stone: WILHELM SCHULER 1855-1913. Suddenly he reached forward and grabbed the woman's arm.

"Who are you?" he asked. The shaking at her arm made the match die.

"I?" she said in a very low voice. "I am the Countess Potowski. There lies my father." Her hand moved halfway up and pointed at the grave.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"But it says he died in 1913. Where? . . . Who is Seventeen?"

"I am," she said.

Lamson bit his lips. "Let's get away from here," he said.

"Yes, of course. We can't stay here." But she lingered a moment longer and he heard her mumble some words in a strange language. Then they quickly left the cemetery.

"Where are we going now?"

"Back to the border. We have to get across. It is no longer safe here, anywhere in this land."

They walked in silence, keeping to the shadows which were very deep. Several times he looked sideways at the woman. In the darkness he could see but little of her face, but he remembered the fine, chiseled features and the white hair . . . and he had felt the narrow hand.

He wondered how old she was. Fifty or thereabouts, he decided. And for more than twenty-five years she had been running a business in the very stronghold of the enemy, waiting and planning to revenge her country.

"Where is the radio?" he asked suddenly.

"What!" she cried, grabbing his arm. "Are you going to signal the fleet?"

"Yes," he said. "You gave me the proof that this is no trap. Your tears did, and the blood on your hands—and the grave of Count Potowski."

"It was for Poland," she murmured almost inaudibly. But then she was practical once more and explained that the truck had coils and dry cell batteries, complete for a simple shortwave transmitter. But the key had been thrown away because it could have created suspicion.

Lamson whistled. He would be hard put to transmit at forty words a minute if he did not have a key; and it *had* to be forty.

KARL was at the truck. The countess sent him away and took the wheel, while Mr. Lamson crawled into the back near a wooden box which she had said contained the parts.

He worked in the darkness, his nimble fingers splicing the wires by twisting the ends and pulling them quickly tight so that the sudden friction fused the copper. After that he climbed back into the front seat, taking the ends of two wires with him.

Now he began working on a makeshift key. What he needed most was something with a spring to it, but he had been unable to find anything that would serve the purpose.

In the end he chose a piece of stout copper wire, pulling it repeatedly around the wooden handle of a hammer, in a quick, whiplike movement. The heat toughened the metal where he wanted it to have spring. At last he was satisfied and began bending the wire to make some sort of a key out of it. Holding the gadget on his knee, he began to practice.

"I am ready," he said, at last. The countess drove the truck into a side road. Mr. Lamson needed only a few minutes to hook up an antenna. He attached the two wires to the improvised key.

"Here goes," he said.

"Thank you," the countess mumbled.

Lamson steadied the key against the steering wheel. "Here's where a Yank orders the British Fleet around," he said to himself; and in spite of everything his mouth pulled itself into a wry smile.

Sparks broke the ether. Once . . . twice . . . half a dozen times in succession. Then he stopped. There was no way of knowing that he had been heard, except that a hundred or so waiting ears had been tuned in on his wavelength since nightfall—ships big and small, from trawlers to cruisers, throughout the no man's land that was the sea.

"How much time have we got?"

"The Gestapo boasts it can locate any sending station within two hours."

"How far are we from the coast?"

"Fifteen minutes in the truck."

Lamson grinned and shot some more ABCDE's into the ether.

"That will have to do," he said. "If they don't get it this time, they never will. Let's go."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

While the countess again took the wheel, Lamson dismantled the equipment, returning the truck to its status of mere contraband runner. The dark expanse of the bay was like a sight of the promised land.

In a little while they had regained the boat and were heading out.

"Halfway across must be Dutch territory," Lamson said, seeing searchlights play over the countryside behind them.

"It is," the countess said, "but it won't help us unless we're ashore." They kept going and Lamson cast anxious glances over his shoulder. He was still looking astern when he felt the boat bump against the dock.

It was still dark when they boarded the train for Amsterdam; but in time the sun rose in the east, blood-red as if to herald the return of bad weather and . . . revenge.

Mr. Lamson looked at the little lady, slumped in her corner. She seemed even slighter than before, her hands deep in the pockets of her coat and her chin sunk on her breast. But her eyes were alive as they seemed to contemplate the fate of those U-boats which were being forced to the surface, their crews gasping for air because she had willed it so.

She slowly faced Mr. Lamson and looked at him for a long minute with sad, tired eyes.

"It was for Poland," she said, reading his thoughts.

CAPTAIN CRICE stood at the railing of the *B 47 X*, waiting impatiently. He raised his eyebrows when Mr. Lamson appeared on the dock, accompanied by a frail little woman.

"Countess Potowski." Mr. Lamson introduced her. Captain Crice, out of some forgotten age of chivalry, bent low over her small hand.

"I am greatly honored, madame," he said.

Almost at once they pulled out. Mr. Stockley had given his superior a curious look but refrained from asking questions. Later in the day he decided that Mr. Lamson's mysterious absence might well have something to do with the repeated code messages he was receiving: *U-boats coming to the surface in plain daylight . . . Our destroyers pounding upon them and accounting for a good many*

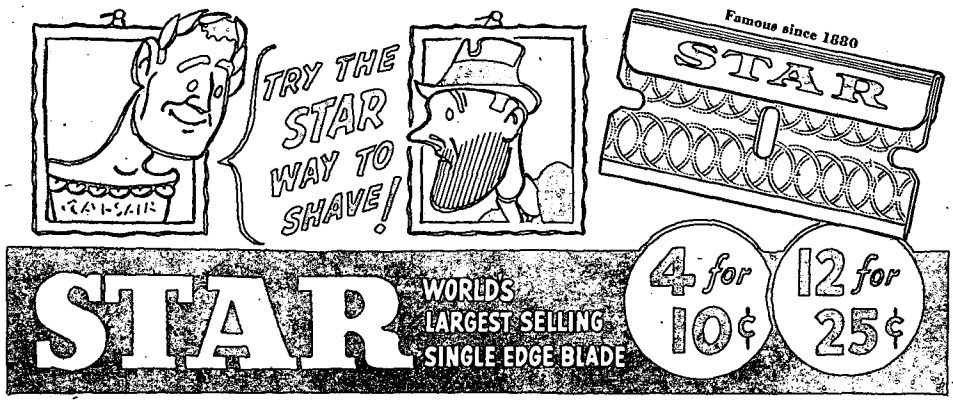
By nightfall his curiosity got the better of him. He went to the old wireless operator's bunk and shook him hard. He saw him open his eyes.

"Listen," he said excitedly, "they've gotten six U-boats so far today!"

Mr. Lamson grunted and his eyes threatened to fall close again.

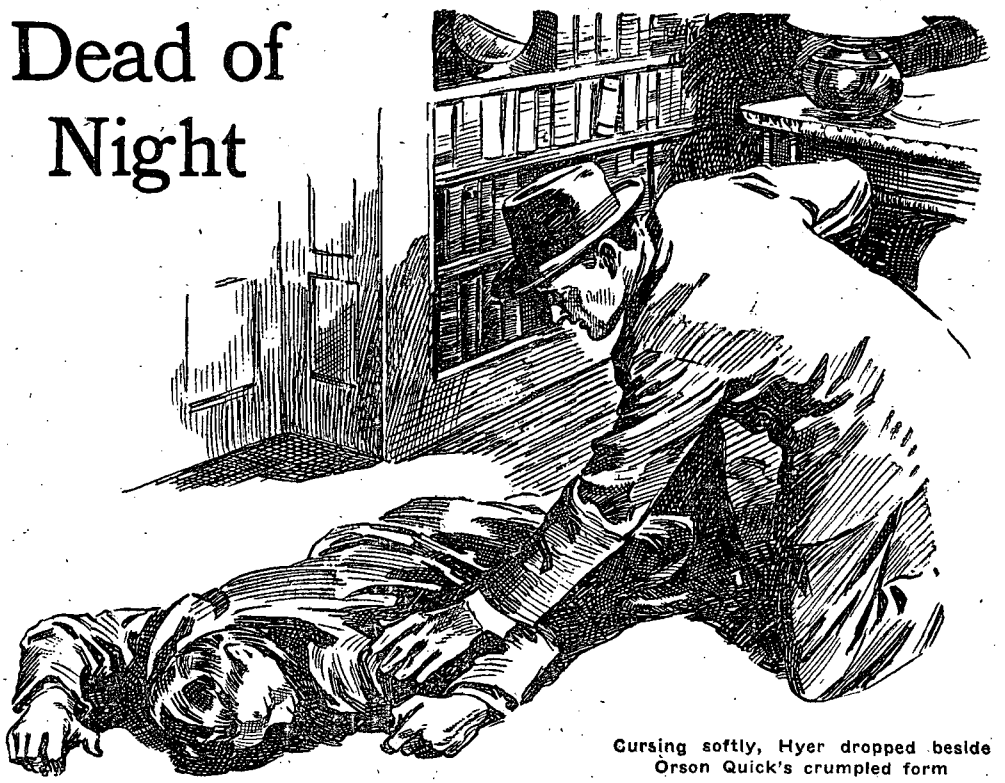
"How come? How did it happen?" Mr. Stockley insisted.

"Polish ham," Mr. Lamson mumbled; "Judgment in cans, you might call it." His weary lips smiled very faintly, and then he rolled over and was once more fast asleep.



PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Dead of Night



Cursing softly, Hyer dropped beside Orson Quick's crumpled form

By KURT STEEL

INVESTIGATING the disappearance—possibly the murder—of publisher NAT THAYER, sleuth HANK HYER runs into as fantastic a collection of human beings as he has ever encountered. First there is—or was—Thayer himself, lately addicted to worrying his partner, PIERRE DAWSON, by running their publishing business according to horoscope. There is BERYL THAYER, his second wife, flighty, eccentric and even more devoted to star-gazing than her husband. There is the prankish and irresponsible RICH LANNING, Beryl's nephew, who is engaged to MARCIA, Thayer's daughter. And finally brooding over all their lives is that eminent racketeer of the planets, the astrologer CLEARSE OWEN.

Before Hyer is called in, Thayer has been missing for five days, last seen on Tuesday morning when he left his Adirondacks camp after an overnight conference with Owen, for whom he has built an elaborate observatory on the grounds. The subject of the discussion was Rich Lanning's inheritance, and Lanning had warned both Thayer and Owen to cease interfering in his affairs.

Two days later, Dawson had received instructions supposedly from Thayer to cash two large checks and mail the money to Thayer in Washington. Thayer had also made an appointment with Lanning at the same time. Someone had called for the cash at the Washington post office, but Lanning had seen no sign of Thayer.

HYER, when he is called into the case by Marcia, manages to plant his red-headed, freckle-faced assistant, ORSON QUICK, in Owen's employ. But before he has made much further progress, the body of KARL SANDLUND, Thayer's caretaker at the camp, is found on Hyer's doorstep. Sandlund had been dismissed by Thayer on Owen's insistence, and Hyer assumes that he has been killed because of something he saw at the camp—something connected with

This story began in the Argosy for June 29

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Nat Thayer's subsequent disappearance.

Marcia and Hank go up to the camp to investigate. Beryl is already there, frantic with worry. She has cast Owen's true horoscope, which she hands over to Hyer, predicting that it will expose the astrologer for the crook she has come to realize he is.

That evening, Hyer is drugged and during the time Marcia and Rich are trying to bring him around, Beryl is shot to death while locked in his room. Hyer hastily remembers Beryl coming into the room when the drug was beginning to take effect, and Marcia assures him that before he had passed out completely in the hall, he had carefully locked the door behind him.

Hyer believes that Beryl had drugged him in an attempt to recover Owen's horoscope and that somehow the murderer, realizing she had discovered something about her husband's disappearance, had gotten into the room and killed her.

Orson Quick, while prowling through the lodge on an errand for Owen, discovers that Owen's passkey will unlock every door in the house. But he has had no chance to communicate this discovery to Hyer.

Meanwhile Dawson has come up from New York. He is convinced that Owen has traced Thayer's signature on the two mysterious checks from other checks of Thayer's in his possession. Owen denies this hotly and Hyer realizes that for the moment the case is at stalemate. He advises State Trooper McKinnon to intensify the search for JEAN, the cook at the camp, who had left the same day as Sandlund and has not turned up since. Sandlund knew something, Hyer is convinced, and was killed. He believes that Jean, frightened, is lying low, but that eventually he will attempt to blackmail the murderer.

Then Jean does turn up—dead, on a train bound for the camp.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE NORTHBOUND CADAVER

JEAN'S death occasioned Hyer a shock he was unable to conceal. The manner in which the news reached him played its own part in this. For Quick had driven Hyer to Big Moose to see the ten-forty from the south arrive. Jean, he had been sure, was too French and too thrifty to fail to show up on payday. Hank wished to be the first to greet Jean after his return from New York.

To be sure, Hyer had said this with a tincture of amusement, but he had said it, and under circumstances that were later to prove no small embarrassment. He had said it, indeed, during the brief, ingenuously casual police investigation which had taken place under the guidance of Inspector Maline of Troop D's Bureau of Criminal Investigation.

The inspector had looked at Hyer with eager interest in his lean youngish face and had said quietly, "Drop in at headquarters and see us on your way back, will you, Hyer?"

After they were all told that they might go about their several affairs again, Marcia stopped Hyer in the east wing corridor and said incredulously, "But they didn't *do* anything."

"They're doing plenty. Only it doesn't show on the surface. They're not flashy, these State men, they're good. They haven't got enough evidence to lock any one of us up on, so they're using simple police strategy."

She flushed. "You mean they'll be watching us?"

Hyer said, "Don't do anything you wouldn't want published in a gossip column."

She bit her lip. "Was I wrong in breaking down and telling them about Dad officially?"

"It had to come out some time."

"There'll be ghastly publicity. It's like doing something mean and disloyal."

They were standing just inside the corridor. Hyer raised a finger and motioned with his head. Orson Quick, on his way to the veranda door, sidestepped into the corridor and came up to them.

Yes, Owen was planning to fly back to New York immediately. Yes, Quick could make some excuse to be left behind.

The boy's greenish eyes glinted. He said, "Now you're showing some sense. I knew you couldn't get along without me."

"All I need is a chauffeur. If Miss Thayer will loan us her car."

Her mouth tilted. "Help yourself."

Which explains how Hyer and Quick came to be driving out of the estate in

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Marcia's maroon cabriolet half an hour later after the boy had been seized of an acute attack of imaginary indigestion and, from his bunk in the observatory, had heard the fading roar of Owen's plane as it took off from the Lake. Dawson was already on his way back to New York and Rich had driven away in Augusta's roadster three quarters of an hour earlier.

WHEN they had left the great rustic gates behind and were speeding along the narrow mountain road through the sunlit, balsam-scented forest, Quick put his hand in his pocket. He said, "I got you these, Hank, like you told me to. First chance I've had to give 'em to you." He held out his closed fist and opened it over Hyer's eager palm.

Sunlight glinted on a key in the folds of a wrinkled square of green paper. Hyer smoothed the paper out. It was a Pullman stub for a certain lower eight in car thirteen dated Monday night, May first. So Rich's claim that he had not been at the Camp on the night before Thayer's disappearance was true. He did not ask Orson where the stub came from.

"And that," the boy said grimly, "is a passkey to the whole house and grounds."

"Does he know you took them?"

The boy shrugged. "He's probably missed 'em, all right."

Hyer said, "Nice going. You'll grow up into a first class crook yet."

"I get pretty good examples set me," Quick retorted. After a time he said, "Jees, but I can't figure this Owen. You know that little entryway outside the office where you all talked to him last night? Well, that's got about a thousand drawers in it, and when I was casing the place yesterday and getting acquainted, I peeked in 'em. Know what they're full of, Hank?"

"Shooting stars."

The boy shook his head. "Little three-by-five cards. Each one's got a name and address on it and a lot of funny marks. From the samplings I made, they look like the sucker list of a mail order house."

Hyer said, "Yes?" with sudden interest.

"Folks there from practically every whistle stop in the United States, I guess. And all those funny symbols, and things like 'sister Mary died 1910' or 'owns quarter-section in Douglas County' or 'push-over for oil stocks.' Things like that on the cards. Don't make sense."

Hyer said, "What else did you find?"

"He's got a private trunk line to Montreal and his own short-wave radio station. The Indian runs it. How do you figure that?"

"Astronomers," Hyer said easily, "have to do a lot of conferring."

Quick said, "Yeah," and trod the accelerator as their road straightened. *"Boy!"* he murmured blissfully.

Hyer said, "Take it easy," nervously.

As they waited by the station, Quick said, "What makes you think the cook'll be on this train?"

"Maybe he won't, but he's had just about enough time for a spree after he—"

They heard a whistle.

"Well," Quick said ironically, "here comes our big moment."

They got out and walked to the cindered platform.

IT WAS clear that Jean's failure to dismount from the train disappointed Hyer. Quick, narrow-eyed and uneasy, watched the single woman passenger get off and dismay showed in his freckled face. He looked at Hyer. "What do we do next, Hank?"

Hyer shrugged. "Wait and meet the afternoon—" He broke off, his round face suddenly immobile, expressionless.

A short distance away, the station agent and train brakeman were engaged in lively gossip.

"Dead, was he?" the agent was saying excitedly. "Right there in 'is berth like that?"

"Yep. Upper seven."

"Well, I be."

Quick looked at Hyer.

Hyer looked at Quick.

"Funny," the brakeman said. "No baggage on him except his ticket and half a

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sandwich. But he had a roll of bills to choke a horse. Nearly a thousand bucks. No identification. Say, come to think of it, he had a ticket right here to Big Moose. Short guy about your height with a head of black hair and a little black mustache with points."

The station agent said, "Well, I be."

"Know 'im?"

"Nope."

The down train, waiting on the siding, began to move with a stertorous puffing and clanging, and the voices were drowned out.

When he and his employer were in the car once more, Quick said, "Maybe we spoke out of turn back there to that inspector, maybe."

A mud-spattered roadster passed them, stopped, and backed. Rich Lanning was at the wheel. He looked tired and worn, but there was a light of triumph in his eyes. Stubble again darkened his square jaw.

Hyer said, "Hello, where've you been?"

Beside him, Quick muttered, "our hero," in disgust.

Rich said, "Come here, Hyer. I want to talk to you." He got out of the roadster, and when they had walked back out of earshot, he said, "I've found the missing station wagon at last. That's what I was doing all yesterday afternoon and evening," he continued rapidly. "This morning I remembered there was a garage there at Thendara—that's the next stop down the line—that had been closed when I went by yesterday. Well, it's there."

Hyer said, "When was it left?"

"Tuesday morning. Just before the train went through. Yes, I talked to the boy that took it in." Rich paused and his mouth tightened. "He's not exactly a moron, but he's low grade enough to be pretty suggestible."

Hyer said, "Oh. But do the suggestions stick?"

"I think so. If you ask him now, he'll tell you—or anyone that asks him—that the station wagon was left by a small, neatly dressed, gray-haired man with polite manners. Not Thayer, of course. At first," Rich hesitated, and looked away. "At first he thought it had been a girl who left the station wagon. I fixed that. He was wrong anyhow."

"Confusion," Hyer murmured, "has its own uses, sometimes." Then he went on casually and without changing his tone, "Jean's dead."

Rich started. "Jean? My God. Three of them, now."

ABRUPTLY, Hyer said, "How much influence have you got over the housekeeper, Augusta? Can you persuade her over the phone to come down to New York with Marcia? I mean it," he said sharply. "I'm not anxious to have a fourth corpse on my conscience, and it may be easier to prevent that in New York where I'm familiar with the trail-blazes."

"Why do you want me to phone?"

"Because you're going down with that boy and me—pronto."

"Oh no, I'm—" Rich began furiously.

"Yes you are. You've done your share up here. That station wagon business was a good piece of police work. You need a vacation."

Rich started to put his pipe into his mouth, hesitated, and dropped it into a pocket. He ran a hand over his unshaven face, looked down at the checkered shirt under his windbreaker, the corduroy breeches, mud-caked boots. "I can't go looking like this. Let me go up to the Lake and change first."

"And walk right into a covey of MacKinnon's troopers? You know how fast news can travel. Maybe they've already put things together down there at Utica."

"Utica?"

"That's where they took Jean's body off the train. When news of that gets around, we'll be lucky if any of us stays out of jail. Come on. There's a phone in that saloon. I'll fix it up with Marcia first."

Rich gave him a quick, sharp glance, turned and walked toward the saloon.

Hyer's telephone conversation with Marcia was terse, noncommittal, guarded.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She said, "All right, where shall we meet you? Gracie Square?"

Hyer squinted. He said, "Wait a minute," tapped his temple with the receiver and scowled. "Rich got a key to the Thayer apartment? All right, you can meet us there—wait a minute— You can meet us there when you see your car parked in East End Avenue between Eighty-third and Eighty-fourth. When you see it parked there, that'll be the green light for you. You can go up to the apartment then. We'll be there."

Marcia said, "You sound like something out of a thriller."

"So does cyanide in an upper berth," Hyer snapped.

As he and Quick waited while Rich talked to Augusta Warren, the boy said, "You show poor judgment in traveling companions, Mister Hyer."

"Shut up."

Rich appeared and Hyer moved over to make room. "By the way," he said, "you two ought to know each other."

Rich acknowledged the introduction with only a momentary lessening of strain. Quick's growl was unpromising.

Hyer, feeling himself somewhat uncomfortably in the position of a separator between the positive and negative plates of a battery being rapidly charged, said, "All right. Let's go."

CHAPTER XXIX

RETURN FROM LIMBO?

SOME five miles out of town, Hyer said, "Wait a minute." Quick drew them to the side of the road, frowned.

"What's the matter?"

"Yes," Rich said, "this is the place."

"What place?" Quick demanded.

"Where they found Pierre Dawson's car. The one they arrested Lanning for stealing from Forest Hills." Hyer pointed down an unused wagon track that struck off into the forest on their right. "What's the mileage?"

Quick said, "Why?"

"The night the car was stolen, Dawson had had it greased at Jack Boyd's in Forest Hills. They marked the mileage on a sticker. MacKinnon gave me that and how far it had been driven when it was wrecked. I'm just curious enough to try to backtrack."

Quick said, "Oh."

Hyer took out his notebook and started to write the number down as Quick read it to him from the speedometer.

"Never mind," Rich said. "I'll take care of the memory department. My one and only talent," he added. He took out his tobacco pouch. "Up to now, it's been as decorative and useless as the flowers that bloom in the spring, tra-la."

Quick started them off at Hyer's gesture.

"Let's see if it's any good," the detective suggested, settling himself more comfortably. "What's the license number on that station wagon?"

Rich promptly told him.

"How many times did Eller, the chauffeur, beat you at checkers last night while MacKinnon was going over the rest of us?"

Rich grinned.

"Seven. I won six, and we drew two."

"When were you first kicked out of school?"

Rich winced. "February twenty-ninth, nineteen twenty-eight. I was ten."

Hyer said, "Leap year. That was an easy one."

"All right. The second time was January eleventh, nineteen thirty. The headmaster had a dictaphone that he used to put his Sunday chapel talks into." Rich chuckled suddenly. "He had a big, slow-witted, sissy sort of lout for a secretary to transcribe the dictaphone cylinders, and we knew he didn't read 'em over again until he got up in the pulpit on Sunday.

"The food in that place," Rich said, "was terrible. Well, the headmaster was a little surprised when he found himself up in front of the whole school one Sunday complaining about the food, in," he chuckled again, "rather well-chosen words, if I do say so."

"What time did Eller say he heard the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

shot that killed Beryl Thayer last night?"

For an instant Rich's face darkened. Then, after a brief hesitation, he said, mimicking the chauffeur with startling fidelity, "'I told you when I heard it. I did not look at the clock.' Then Arch said, 'Listen, if you think I—' Is that what you mean?"

Hyer said admiringly, "That was a good deal more than I meant. You do it pretty well."

"Believe me, do you?"

Hyer said, "I believe you."

"I remember things," Rich said, lighting his pipe. "Always have. Beryl used to say it's because my censor isn't normal."

At that point conversation came to a full stop.

Afterward, Hyer tried, without effect, to interest Rich in a further exploiting of his memory, but the young man merely answered in monosyllables, and when Hyer's social attentions became too obviously one-sided, Quick muttered something about "people who collect watches." This obscure reference to the fact that the watch that Thayer carried right up to his disappearance had been found on Rich Lanning angered Hank. He kicked Quick's shins smartly.

Rich, on the point of a reply, controlled himself with an apparent effort.

At length, Hyer gave up and went to sleep.

THE trip could scarcely be described as a social success, but they reached the city without being stopped and this achievement made any temperamental discomfort somewhat less important than the hum of a fading swarm of gnats.

Hyer's sleep had freshened him noticeably, and even Quick responded to the relaxed strain when, a little after dark, he drew up, at Hyer's direction, in East End Avenue just a little south of Eighty-fourth street.

"What's the point of stopping here?" the boy objected. "Why not drive up in style? Lanning could be on his way to a fancy-dress ball, you know." But his sarcasm was only tone-deep, and after a brief scornful survey of the corduroy breeches timber shirt, and windbreaker, he glanced up and caught Rich's eye. He chuckled. Impulsively he said, "Boy, you're a sight. If Marcia could see you now."

"You're no Beau Brummel, yourself," Rich retorted and grinned.

Hyer, grateful for this rapport, breathed more easily. "The point of stopping here," he said, following Rich to the sidewalk, "is to give Marcia her bearings. When she sees the car here, she'll bring the rest of the troupe up."

They crossed the street.

"Why all the precautions?" Quick asked.

"If I'd started taking them a little earlier," Hyer said testily, "we might still have Jean around to ask questions of."

They were halfway down the block toward the grotto-like entrance to the apartment house, when Rich said suddenly, "Look here, wouldn't I better wait outside? I could go over and sit in the park there."

Hyer took his arm. "Come on. I want to see what's upstairs, and I don't want to worry about any side issues."

Whatever surprise Hyer may have anticipated upstairs in the Thayer apartment, the news that met them in the lobby clearly left him as non-plussed as his two companions.

Mr. Thayer had called at 9.30 the morning before and dismissed all the servants. A messenger had delivered their salaries two hours later and collected the keys.

"Where'd the messenger get the money?" Rich demanded.

"I don't rightly know that, sir." The elevator man was increasingly unhappy. "I'd feel better if you talked to the management about it, Mr. Lanning. I don't know if Mr. Thayer would have liked me to say anything."

The elevator stopped and the door slid open.

Rich said, "That's all right, Miller. We'll forget you mentioned it. As soon as we find the place empty, I'll call the manager and get the news that way."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

AT LAST when the three of them were standing in the small decorous seventeenth-floor foyer out of which a single entrance door opened. Rich swung his latch key and looked from Hyer to Quick and back. "If I tell you I don't like this," he said, "I suppose you'll rag me."

Hyer said, "You'll be voicing a general sentiment. Open the door."

Rich turned his key, pushed open the door, strode into the dark hallway.

A switch snapped and the hallway leaped alight, spacious, chaste, unchanged apparently by so much as a mote of dust since Hyer had walked out of it at daybreak forty hours earlier. The rosewood paneling glowed softly, the staircase curved silently upward. But two of the four doors, all of which were normally kept closed, now stood open, and of the three aquatints along the unbroken wall the center one was clearly and unblushingly askew.

Rich said, his voice lowered, "Someone's been here all right. Regan wouldn't have left a picture hanging like that. He'd straighten a wall calendar on his way to a cyclone cellar."

Hyer said, "Let's see."

They went into the drawing room where Rich pointed out further minute evidence of intrusion. "That needlepoint chair," he said, "always sat square with the design in the carpet. Look at it. There's another picture hanging cockeyed. And that cope always came within exactly three inches of the windows on each side of the fireplace. Nice to know the cops have been around. In the movies," he added, grinning, "the first thing police look for is a wall-safe. God knows why."

They went into the dining room where Rich, at Hyer's question, indicated the telephone in its concealed nook. Hyer took it out, listened, said, "Well, it's still alive," and gave a number. Presently he said, "Hello . . . That's right. We just got in . . . Up at the Thayer apartment. It seems he called up yesterday morning and paid off the help for some reason. Nobody tried to get in touch with you? . . . All right, why don't you? . . . Yes, Rich is with me. The rest are coming . . . Fine. We'll be expecting you." He hung up.

"That was Dawson," he said. "He's coming over."

"Well," Quick said, and his greenish eyes had an eager professional glint, "let's look the joint over."

Hyer shrugged. "Go ahead. I want to go down and have a talk with the manager."

This functionary, a small nervous man with a gray pompadour and prominent ears, Hyer found somewhat loath to discuss the situation. Nathaniel Thayer's disappearance ardently associated by the press with two violent deaths, had already brought considerable notoriety into the small nervous man's life, and he answered Hyer's questions sharply and uncoöperatively.

Some ten unfruitful minutes had passed when Hyer again went up to the apartment. To his ring there was no answer.

Miller, the elevator man, who was waiting, stared wide-eyed across the foyer, and thin color ebbed from his sallow cheeks.

Hyer looked over his shoulder. He said, "Go on. If I can't get in, I'll call you."

Miller popped back into his car like a startled prairie dog.

The moment its door slid shut, Hyer was at work on the lock, murmuring profanely to himself, his fingers unsteady at first. It was a good lock. Another five minutes passed before it gave.

Hyer's breath came rapidly as he walked into the apartment. The lights were on as he had left them.

He paused, listened. Then, walking lightly and warily on the balls of his feet, he made a quick inspection of the first floor. Coming back into the rosewood hall, his round face now a rigid, expressionless mask, he ran up the stairs, pushed open the first door he came to, snapped on the light.

This was the missing publisher's library. It was empty. The bedroom adjoining it was also empty.

The third room Hyer entered testified to the wide range of Beryl Hawtrey Harnett Thayer's interests. Partly salon, partly

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

curiosity shop, one full wall solidly ranged with books, it was a chamber striking enough in its own right.

But just then Hyer was oblivious to the room's proper décor.

He was on his knees beside the unconscious form of Orson Quick.

CHAPTER XXX

THE STARS FELL ON ALOYSIUS

IN CHASE REMSEN'S curtained, smoke-filled study, where, at five o'clock in the morning two days before, Hyer had given the mathematician Clearse Owen's true horoscope with instructions to work it backward, the detective put down the telephone for the third time and moved his hand aimlessly among a litter of papers on the desk. He drew a long breath and rubbed his eyes.

From the morris chair, Remsen watched him. The mathematician's high narrow forehead and thin, knife-edged features were in shadow, but in their sunken sockets his lively eyes glowed with what a moment before had been a dry academic triumph and was now, as he waited for Hyer to speak, quick sympathy.

"Some stupid interne that time," Hyer said moodily. "No change yet. I couldn't get the doctor." There was a moment of silence. Hyer rubbed his eyes again. "He's got a private room."

He rose abruptly, took a few steps, came back, and sat on a corner of the desk. He took out a cigarette, studied it a moment, broke it in two. "All right," he said in a lifeless voice. "Go on."

Remsen glanced at his notes. "Saturn in Cancer, Neptune in Taurus gave high probability of the year. Eighteen ninety-six."

Hyer nodded, preoccupied with the cigaret he was shredding.

"Pluto three degrees forty-three minutes forty-five seconds Virgo made that certain. Sun in Scorpio ten degrees and six minutes—obviously November second. November, second, eighteen ninety-six."

Again Hyer nodded.

"Comparison with Moon twenty-seven degrees thirty-four minutes Capricorn gave one forty-five Greenwich mean time." The mathematician paused, turned his pencil minutely. "Thus time coördinate determined almost to the minute. Century, year, day, hour."

Hyer, interested despite himself, said, "Good."

"Could be any spot on the globe."

Hyer's nascent interest faded. He shrugged. "Well, at least you did the best you—"

"But precise Scorpio ten degrees six minutes rising—"

"Wait a minute!" Hyer sat up, eager. "You said Sun was ten degrees six minutes Scorpio."

"Precisely."

"Then it means sunrise?"

Remsen nodded.

"Sunrise," Hyer said, excited, "could have been only one place at one-forty-five Greenwich time that day."

"Not one place, Henry. Band varying from a foot to twenty miles wide—pole to pole—along longitude one hundred degrees twenty minutes west."

Hyer sat back, sighed. "Well, it was a good—"

"So had to get latitude," Remsen broke in.

Hyer's jaw dropped.

"Up to this point," the mathematician said, "pure astronomy. Now," distaste touched his thin lips, "astronomy gets muddy. Astrology. All right, astrology. Still accurate, but—" he moved his hand, "muddy. Table of houses. Never mind. Table of houses. All right. Cusps. Remember cusps listed in that memo? Second house fifteen degrees fifty-four minutes Aries, third house eighteen degrees fifty-five minutes Taurus. Others, too." His shoulders twitched. "Muddy—but accurate."

"Go on."

"Reduce Greenwich mean noon, November second, eighteen ninety-six to sidereal time. Sixteen hours, forty-one minutes, fifty-nine and fourteen hundredths seconds

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

after intrapolation for one forty-five. Consult tables of houses. Gives latitude, of course."

Hyer said, "Of course," weakly.

"With all corrections made, that is."

Hyer nodded.

"Well, latitude comes out forty-four degrees twenty minutes north. Defines precise area forty miles square on earth's surface, six-forty-five—sunrise there—November second, eighteen ninety-six. Elementary."

Hyer slipped off the desk and dropped into a chair. He murmured, "My God." Then he sat up. "Where?" hoarsely.

Remsen nodded. "Get out the atlas. From then on," he concluded, and his staccato manner had a trace of scorn, "nothing more to be done."

"What?"

REMSEN shrugged. "Police work, Henry. Shoddy police work. That parallel runs through sparse section of western South Dakota—eastern Wyoming. One town—only one—in whole belt fitted. Pierre."

"Pierre?" Hyer said, "Oh, South Dakota."

"Telephoned the recorder in Pierre. Seemed to have some difficulty, but they found what I wanted." Remsen rubbed his sharp, high-bridged nose, and his eyes bored brightly at Hyer with a gleam that belied his protestation of distaste. "At four-thirty on the morning of November second, 1898, one Widow Cleary bore a son. Duly christened, three days later, Aloysius Cleary. My informant," he went on with dry amusement, "proved a garrulous chap. Something of a local chronicler. Name unlocked a freshet of reminiscence. Proceeded to give it to me—tune of five dollars every three minutes."

"I'll pay the toll," Hyer said hastily. "What?"

"Young Aloysius a provincial Lothario from the age of ten. When he was nineteen he had twice left town until scandals blew over. Two years later he was clerk in the local bank and a large sum of specie disappeared one Friday afternoon. So did Aloysius. They caught him. Tried him. Some melodrama in that. Two prairie belles threw themselves at the judge and begged for mercy when the jury came in. Sentenced to twenty years in the state penitentiary. Served," Remsen concluded, "three. Details of the escape quite ingenious." He waited.

Hyer was staring down at the map and the sheets of notation on the desk, his mouth a rueful line. "Twenty-four hours ago," he said softly, "all that might have been worth ten thousand dollars, Chase." That was what Beryl had agreed to pay him for discrediting Clearse Owen. He shrugged.

When he looked up, Remsen was already deep in the problem Hyer had interrupted with his stealthy entrance half an hour earlier.

He looked at his watch, nervously reached for the phone again. After a moment's wait, he said huskily, "I want to talk to Dr. Roberts. . . Hello, doctor. I'm calling again about that Quick boy in 314." He listened, paled, said, "Fractured skull?" his voice breaking in a near falsetto. "But you think— You don't— Well, look doctor, don't spare anything, will you? Not anything."

He replaced the phone, jerked it again from the cradle and called Clearse Owen's number. No, the astrologer had not come in.

On a sudden impulse he telephoned the Organdy Club, and then, the furious light in his eyes, tempered with a nervous caution, he called police headquarters and asked for Inspector Turner.

"This is Hyer," he said briskly. "Have you combed that hideout in Queens, yet? One I told you about, on Bowery Bay. . . So Owen hasn't showed up? . . . Never mind where I am. I'll come in when I've got time."

He jammed the phone down impatiently, studied a sheet of figures for a time, and took out his pencil to make a note. The pencil was leadless. Absently he picked up an oversize fountain pen from the desk, wrote *Jailbreak 1921,* in red ink, absently

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

capped the pen and slipped it into his pocket.

Hyer slipped off the desk, stood irresolute a moment.

Remsen, engrossed in his work, paid no heed.

HYER went to the window, drew the muffling curtains open a crack and peered obliquely up Bank Street. Just this side of his own house stood a black sedan, a sedan which certain subtle marks identified to him as a police car as clearly as if it had borne an official label. In the car he could barely distinguish two men. They had been waiting there when he dodged up Remsen's steps thirty minutes before.

He stiffened. A limousine passed slowly in front of the window and drew up in front of his own stoop.

Hyer dropped the curtains, reached the telephone in three long strides. In a moment he said swiftly, "Tony, this is Mr. Hyer. Do me a favor, Tony, will you? There'll be a big black limousine with a man and two women in it come by your shop in a minute. Tell 'em I said to leave the car, take a cab, come back to Number twenty-three, and ring Remsen's doorbell twice. . . . Never mind your customer, Tony. . . . All right, all right, so she wants avocados. I'll buy every avocados in your place tomorrow. . . . Yes, bananas, too. . . . Tony," sharply, "you're a Sicilian pirate. Get out and stop that car."

Hyer's manner was marked by no fine warm glow of hospitality when he opened Remsen's living room door a few minutes later and greeted his four callers. The Thayer chauffeur, Eller had accompanied his passengers, and stood a little to the rear, his cadaverous face putty-colored, his dark sunken eyes burning.

Marcia was pale, worn, anxiety bitter in the set of her young mouth.

Augusta Warren, at Marcia's shoulder, gave Hyer a hard hostile scrutiny. A man's heavy overcoat lent new bulk to her massive frame, made comic contrast of the small nondescript black hat atop her gray hair.

As Hyer motioned them into the room, Dawson said, "We hear the boy—"

"He's in the hospital."

Marcia wheeled. "But where's Rich?"

Augusta looked accusingly at Hyer. "Yes," she rumbled, "Where's Rich? And where did *you* go?"

"To a hospital," Hyer snapped. He looked at Dawson, "Well, what had happened when you got there?"

"Marcia and Gussie had just arrived," Dawson said. "The place was full of police. Among other things, they were curious about what had happened to you."

"What else?"

"How could he have got out of the apartment?" Dawson said, frowning.

"Service door. It's got a chain, but the chain wasn't on." His eyes narrowed. "Or was it when you people got there?"

For a moment no one answered.

Eller said quietly, "No sir, the chain lock was off."

"We've got to find Rich," Marcia said desperately. "They're already saying he's the one who attacked the boy."

Hyer's bloodshot eyes rested on her briefly. "Somebody did."

Marcia bit her lip.

"Where are you people staying?" Hyer asked. "Dawson's?"

Dawson said, "No, I suggested that but—"

"We've rooms at the St. Julian," Marcia said.

"Have any of you seen or heard from Owen?" Hyer saw passion flicker an instant in Eller's shadowed eyes.

No one had.

"Has he disappeared?" Dawson demanded.

"Temporarily."

Marcia said hoarsely, "You're not going to help us find Rich?"

Hyer's manner eased. "The best thing you can do is get some sleep." Then to Eller, "Where are you staying?"

"At the St. Julian, sir."

Hyer said, "Then you'll all be together in case I want to get in touch with you?"

He opened the door, walked down the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hall with them. Then, as he was on the point of ushering them out, he stepped to one side and peered through the narrow pane beside the door. The loitering sedan with its two occupants still waited outside his house.

Over his shoulder to Dawson, Hyer said hurriedly but with decision, "How about putting me up for the night?"

As she and Augusta rode to the St. Julian in a cab, Marcia replied in monosyllables to the older woman's few rumbled comments.

Her mind was made up. Wild and improbable as it seemed, she knew that there was something there in the house on Gracie Square—something she must find, something she could not find while the others were there, but only now when she could return alone.

With amazement she saw that the big woman beside her was weeping. Mechanically she said, "Rich is going to be all right, Gussie," and could think only of what she herself must do.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE SECRET ALIBI

IT WAS surprisingly easy. Augusta, dazed and docile after her show of grief, was persuaded to go to bed at once in one of the adjoining rooms Marcia had engaged at the St. Julian. A scant twenty minutes after their arrival, Marcia was slipping out of the other room, walking toward the elevators.

The problem of reëntering the apartment house was a minor one. No police detail had been left, and both Peters the doorman and Miller the elevator boy readily accepted her story of the headache powders which she found herself in desperate need of.

"I'll wait, Miss Thayer," Miller said, as she stepped out of the elevator on the seventeenth floor.

"Oh no, you really needn't, Miller. I'm not quite sure where they are. It may take some time."

But he was still watching her anxiously as she turned her key in the lock, and nearly thirty seconds passed after she entered the dark hall before she heard the elevator descend.

Her heart pounding, she listened. There was no sound. She tiptoed into the drawing room where a faint, uncertain dusk came from the night sky, on through the arch into the dining room, fear slipping over her like an ether bath.

It was worse, far worse, than she had anticipated.

She was numb when she stood at last in the embrasure of the windows and stared with hot smarting eyes over the night-shrouded river. Far below, Welfare Island thrust its sharp weathered spur upstream, the small lighthouse on its tip like the fo'c'sle lamp on a prow stubbornly breasting the tide rip. A mile downstream the lights on Queensborough Bridge twinkled, and Marcia half imagined she could see the familiar lifting tracery of its spire-like girders. A tug hooted on the dark river directly below her window. Lights of three laden barges slipped sedately past.

Gradually the familiar sights and sounds quieted her and the paralysis that had gripped her mind began to relax. It was as if she were picking up a surreptitious thread she had laid down when the thought had first come to her and the apartment was filled with people. Now there was no one to stop her, no one to ridicule what she was about to do, no one to come to her aid if—

She shook her head and went quickly toward the kitchen before that thought could form.

THE kitchen was pitch dark, and for a moment she hesitated. But some furtive caprice prevented her from turning on the light. Noiselessly she picked her way across the room, skirting table and range, her knuckles slipping along the cool smooth surface of the big refrigerator, finding at last a door that led to an entryway on which the service entrance opened and where back stairs ascended to the floor above.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She let herself into the entryway, into the faint sickish odor of mops and polishing compound. Here she struck a match, and in its flicker dimly discerned cupboards, the back door, steps leading up.

She stopped, listened. Not a sound came to her. As her hand touched the knob of the back door, she gave a start. She thought, "Some one could open that door and seize me and I could scream and no one would hear," and she pictured the blank elevator door, the iron stairway descending in its sharp square spirals to the street level, seventeen floors below. She shivered as she hurried on.

But just as she started up the stairs to the second floor, she stopped again, her heart fluttering, a thickness at the base of her tongue. Overhead there had been a sound at last, a hushed, evasive noise, scarcely audible in the stillness.

Gripped anew by the paralyzing fear, she was about to turn back when she caught herself. She listened. The sound was not repeated. She had imagined it, of course. That was it, she had imagined it. Left hand clenched, right grasping the stair rail convulsively, she fought herself upward step by step.

She thought, "Rich was here . . . Here in this house . . . Four hours ago . . ."

As she emerged from the stairs she stopped and listened again, unconsciously flattening herself against the wall. Before her lay the invisible hall. So familiar was she with its every detail that she could all but see the wallpaper where galleons endlessly buffeted a static sea. Ten steps away was the door to Beryl's room.

Beryl's room. Where it had happened. Where Orson Quick had been struck down.

It was as if a hand urged her forward.

At last her fingers felt the smooth panel of her stepmother's door. She stopped once more, held her breath, listened. Then she gritted her teeth. The door was ajar. But when she would have pushed it open, revulsion seized her and she drew back. Summoning every trace of her courage, she pushed the door and entered the dark room.

Again she hesitated, quivering.

Here. Here, where Quick had lain. Where it had happened. Where Rich might have stood. This was a dead woman's room. The scenes at Manitou Lake rushed back over her. In the darkness she felt her eyes film with quick, unaccountable horror.

Then she stiffened and a scream caught in her clogged throat.

Her hand had brushed warm, living flesh.

Delirious panic was followed at once by a surge of excitement, for the voice at her ear, saying, "Marcia," guardedly, was Rich Lanning's, and the hand which her fingers had brushed was closing firmly upon her own.

Choking, she cried, "Rich—Rich—" Because for the moment she knew only her unspeakable relief and joy at finding him, she could but strain to him. Her face pressed hard into the rough woollen windbreaker, her trembling fingers sought his face.

"Where is Hyer? And Quick?"

SHE pushed herself away, and the strain began to return. "Hyer is all right," she said, when he repeated his question insistently. "Quick—Quick's in a hospital." Thinking, fearing, seeing the white aseptic room, the nurses, the cool benign bright instruments and what it might mean to them, she clung to him again.

"You came here—alone?" Rich whispered.

She nodded against his hand, strove to repel the thoughts that now with the clarity of wakefulness assailed her openly.

"Why?" he asked.

She said, "I was looking for you. I thought if I came here—here where it happened, I might—something might—" Ashamed of herself as she tried to tell him, she stopped. "I was foolish."

"You were game. I love you for it," he whispered.

She gave herself up to one final moment of peace, and then the clamorous problem was upon her again. She said, "They mustn't find you here. If Quick

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

should—Quick may be dead. They'll say you killed him, just as they're saying—They mustn't find you here."

His hand tightened on her arm. "Let me show you something."

He put her down gently. She heard him walk across the room. Light blinded her and she shut her eyes. When she opened them, he had taken her hands and was drawing her to her feet. With his arm about her shoulders, he led her to a closet door that stood ajar.

"This," he said. He opened the door, pushed aside the gowns that hung from hangers, and drew her inside.

Marcia gasped. It was a roomy closet, some five feet wide. The end wall had swung in like a door. She could see that behind it was a recess. Rich thrust his arm through the opening and turned a switch. The light revealed a narrow cubicle, as wide as the closet and seven or eight feet long. A cot took up most of the space.

"But how—?" Marcia began, incredulous. "The contractor who built the house wouldn't have—" She stopped. "I know. This is why she had the carpenters here the summer Dad and I were gone. There's another closet in her bedroom that meets this one—or did. She had a section taken out of each and the space made." She shivered. Then she frowned. "But what's that?"

At the head of the cot, supported on brackets, was a small telephone switchboard. In its center was a recessed mouthpiece. On a hook hung headphones.

She said, "A switchboard?" in amazement. "She could listen in when anyone used the other phones." Her eyes widened, filling with deliberate anger.

"Apparently she could."

"But the telephone company, Rich. They wouldn't have allowed it. It's wire-tapping."

"The telephone company needn't have known about it, dear. There was already a switchboard in the butler's pantry. The house is full of phones. The difference in resistance wouldn't have shown up, and if the wires were carefully concealed no one would ever find it."

Marcia was thinking. She bit her lip. The anger kindling in her blue eyes glowed brighter. She said, "That explains something. My telephone calls used to be cut off. Oh, not many times, but oftener than accident would account for. Once I remember she came on the line immediately afterward and gave me the devil because I'd used unladylike language. I told her what I thought of eavesdroppers, but I never suspected—this." She turned to him. "You were in here—just now?" and it was as if she stumbled and had to clutch him for support.

Rich nodded. "Tied up, with a bandage over my mouth." He pointed to the floor. She saw strips of sheeting and a wide crumpled piece of adhesive tape.

"I was knocked out when Quick was," Rich continued. "When I came to, I was bound and lying on that cot. I managed to work the ropes off a little while ago. God knows, how I found the catch that opens the wall."

MARCIA was not listening. She said, "You must get out of here. Quickly, without anyone seeing you. The police are looking for you. We'll go straight to Hyer. He'll know what to do."

Rich shook his head. "If the police are looking for me, I'd better—"

"No. No. They mustn't find you, mustn't know you've been here. We'll make up some kind of a story. Hyer will be able to do that. Look," she said rapidly. "The service stairs."

"Thanks. I'm not sneaking out—"

"You're doing exactly what I say." Then, her voice catching, she said, "Please, darling. If Quick should—die, you'd be—"

He put his arm about her, drew her toward him, tipped her face up. He smiled, said, "All right."

Waiting in her car at the dead end, with the river lapping softly on the rocks twenty feet below and the endless interwoven murmur of the city's nightsounds about her, Marcia clenched her hands on

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the wheel and counted slowly. The low, flat-arched exit from the house's carriageway was but a few yards beyond, and any moment Peters might step out for a contraband smoke and see her waiting there. A loitering car would certainly attract the attention of the policeman on the beat if he should pass the street entrance.

Her hands grew icy and she breathed in short, light gasps like a spent runner.

Then her heart leaped. The service door was opening. A moment later Rich was beside her and they were moving away, past the carriageway exit, across East End Avenue, westward, gathering speed, hurrying away, away from—what? Hurrying into what?

She refused to think further.

WHEN they stood at last at Dawson's door in Forest Hills, a reflex caused her to glance at her watch just before she touched the bell. It was a few minutes past three. As they waited, she felt Rich's arm about her, knew in swift intuitive certainty that he was afraid, that at last the many piling incidents had told, had struck through that gay resilient defense and quickened within him the same fear that had been with her constantly now for two days, since first in a moment of flawless insight she had grasped the whole tangled ominous pattern.

If some cunning hand were intent on fixing guilt upon him . . .

A furious anger quenched her fear.

Then Dawson had opened the door and she was hastening past him, scarcely conscious of his excited, "Why, Rich, boy. It's good to see you."

Hyer, wearing a blue and white bathrobe, his hair touseled, looked at her from the stairway. He saw Rich, said, "Hello."

"I heard you say you'd be here. I found him," Marcia cried. "I went back to the apartment. He was there. He'd been knocked out. The same way Quick had. Tied up."

Behind her Rich said, "How is Quick?"

Hyer came down the stairs slowly. "Ten minutes ago, he was still unconscious."

Dawson and the detective listened while she told her story, listened while Rich described, accurately and directly, what had happened to him. Hyer showed neither curiosity nor especial interest when they told him of the concealed cubicle.

Gradually it came to Marcia that Hyer was showing little enough interest in anything they were saying. Her first, quite normal resentment, was followed at once by a tightening sense of caution. As Hyer asked a question and Rich answered it, she studied the detective intently.

There could be no doubt about it. Hyer's manner had none of its usual sanguine liveliness. He stared at the lengthening ash on his cigarette, and Marcia realized with a start that from the time she had made her announcement when they entered the room, Hyer had avoided meeting her eyes directly.

The feeling she had was not a novel one. Years of experience had trained her to sense the precise instant when remedial measures were necessary lest a situation go completely out of hand, and always before she had been able neatly, urbanely, to shift the conversation away from a dangerous topic.

Now she was helpless. She could only sit and listen, her infallible intuition dinning into her that something was wrong.

The answer when it came was so disturbing that for a moment she refused to trust her own perception. Watchful, silent now, her eyes narrowed and intent, she looked from Hyer to Rich and back, assaying her problem.

If Rich suspected the same thing she did, he did not show it. He talked easily, candidly, answering Hyer's questions without hesitancy or strain.

But now she knew. *Hyer did not believe Rich.*

"I WANTED to go right to the police," Rich was saying, "but Marcia lured me out the back way and brought me here."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Well," Hyer said wearily, "perhaps you were right."

A quiet implacable fury began to rise in Marcia, but because the fear was still there and because she knew that protest would only strengthen Hyer's suspicions, she merely nodded when Rich looked at her quickly and smiled.

"Tell 'em the whole thing, the way you've told it to us," Hyer added.

"What if they don't believe him?" Marcia protested. "What if they want to say that Rich is lying? He has only his word—no witnesses, no proof."

Hyer put out his cigarette. "It might have helped if you'd actually found him tied up, yes. It wouldn't have helped much, though. Well," he went on before this innuendo could bring a burst of resentment from Marcia, "do you want to start for Mexico, Lanning?"

"No, thanks."

"You want to give yourself up then?"

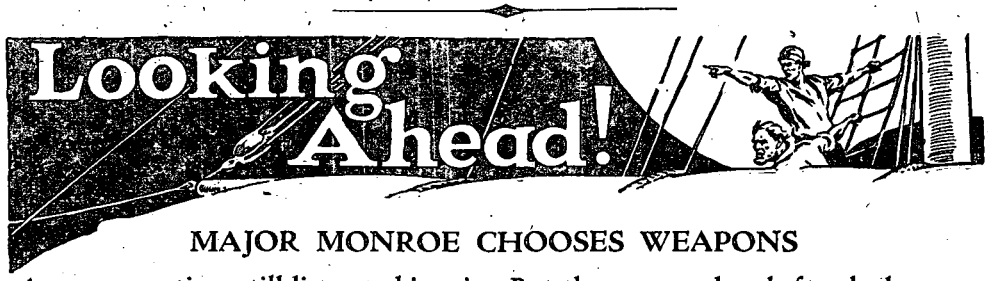
"Do you think I'd better?" He glanced at Dawson and his eyes were worried.

Hyer rose. He said, "I'll call Inspector Turner. He's the one you'll want to talk to."

Vaguely, through her preoccupation, Marcia heard him call a number on the telephone in the hall. Her fury had passed. She was accustomed to being thrown back on her devices. Her only mistake had been in trusting him too naively. It was a mistake she rarely made. Coolly, objectively, she measured this new problem and set herself to planning the next move. Of one thing she was certain. From now on she would play a lone hand.

She smiled swiftly at Dawson. Then, her face settling again into lines of fatigue and disappointment, she looked toward the door beyond where Hyer was talking, and her calm blue eyes were touched with hostility. Hyer had made the deadliest kind of enemy. . . .

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK



MAJOR MONROE CHOOSES WEAPONS

Aggressor nations still listen to his voice. But there was a day, before he became president, when he might have been afraid to fight a duel—and not because of personal cowardice either. Another fine novelet of what-may-have-been, by

THEODORE ROSCOE

UPSET IN UTOPIA

Don't look now, but that wasn't no lady—that was a spy. San Utopia, which should be devoted to good clean roulette, is crawling with 'em. But—ssh!—the guy with her is a Br-t-sh S-cr-t Ag-t; he'll fix it. Beginning a new novel of wacky people and fast-action intrigue by

D. L. AMES

TRAITOR'S ARROW

Today the Highlanders take up their arms; they march to battle for Scotia, and their leader has quaffed the heady brew of the gods. Another fine novelet in the Odin's cup series, by

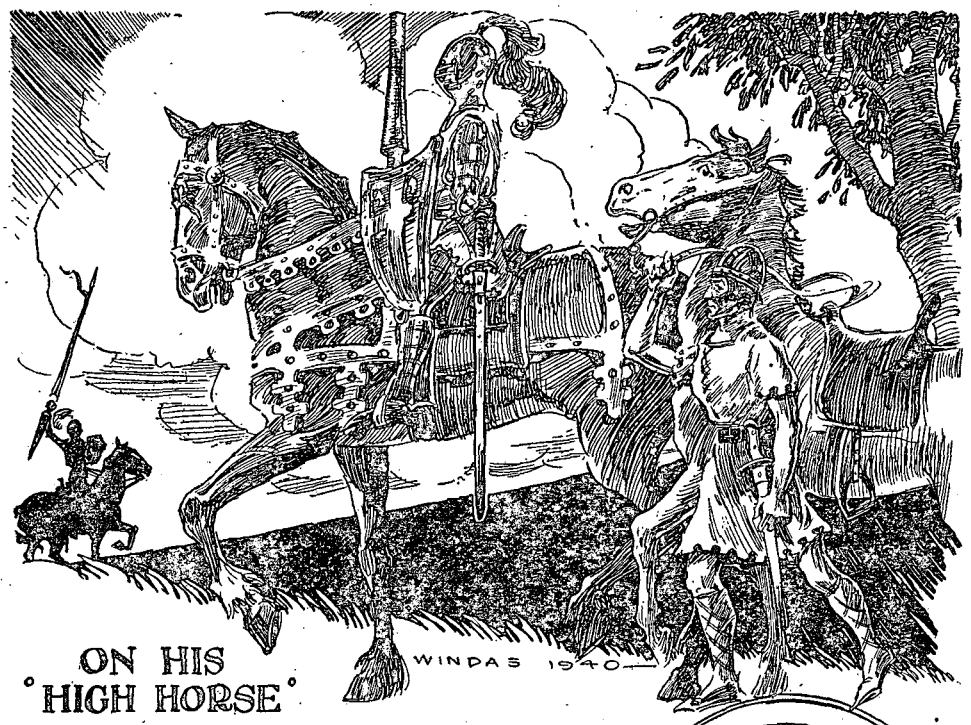
PHILIP KETCHUM

COMING IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—AUGUST 10

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LEGENDS OF THE LEGIONARIES

ORIGINS OF THE CUSTOMS AND SAYINGS OF THE FIGHTING-MEN : by W·A·WINDAS

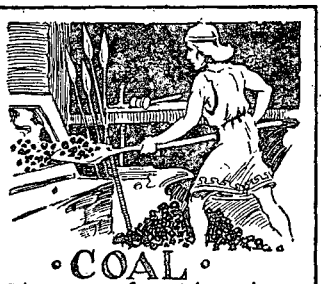


ON HIS "HIGH HORSE"

This expression, today, means to be angry. It originated in the Middle Ages, when a knight generally used two horses; one a medium-sized riding hack, the other a powerful charger. To avoid tiring the latter he would ride the smaller horse en route. If he met an enemy, he would at once change mounts. Thus "to get on your high (large) horse" meant getting ready for a fight.

FIRST MIDSHIPMEN

The first Midshipmen of the British Navy were the "King's Letter Boys," created after the founding of the Admiralty Board. They were mostly sons of gentlemen, and were called Midshipmen because they occupied quarters built amidships.

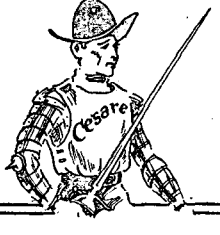


COAL

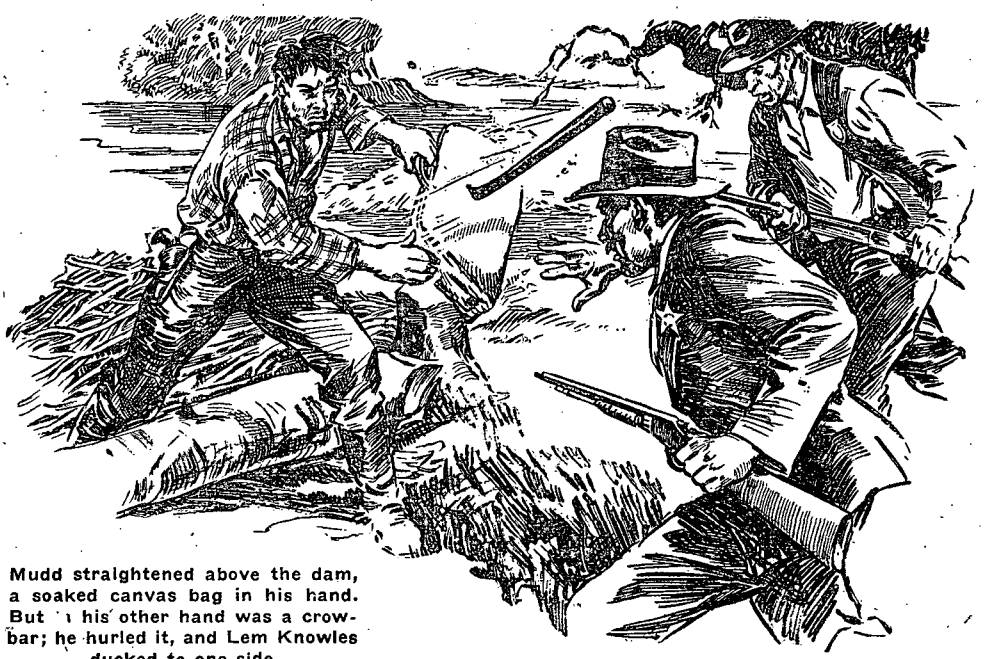
Discovery of coal is not so recent as supposed. Armorers of ancient Greece used coal (not charcoal) in their forges as early as 300 B.C.

FIRST UNIFORMS

First to uniform his army was Cesare Borgia, the man accused (unjustly) of so many poisonings. His army had the word "Cesare" embroidered on their surcoats.



PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Mudd straightened above the dam, a soaked canvas bag in his hand. But in his other hand was a crowbar; he hurled it, and Lem Knowles ducked to one side

First Catch Your Beaver

The posse is out for Wayne McCloud tonight; there are bloodhounds behind him, nothing but a beaver dam and an aspen trunk ahead. And all because of a crazy kid who thought he wanted to be a cowboy

By JIM KJELGAARD

Author of "Fox In the Bag", "From Misty Swamp", etc.

A MAN couldn't haul off and say that animals were better than people, Wayne McCloud thought. But a man could be safe in saying that some animals were better than some people.

Wayne thrust the three joints of his trout rod under his arm as he watched Mudd Hobbs' team come up the Dabbit Run road. There wasn't a particle of doubt in Wayne's mind that Mudd's horses were a whole lot better than Mudd himself.

A car rattled past Wayne down the road. The team swung out and waited patiently until the car had gone by, then started again. Wayne stepped in the road ahead of them and they stopped. The black nickered softly at the friendly touch of Wayne's hand and the roan nibbled Wayne's arm with his lips.

"Takin' the boss home again, huh?" Wayne crooned. "I dunno what he'd do without you."

Wayne stepped aside. The two horses tightened the traces and resumed their methodical plodding. The reins from the bridles strung loosely back to the long wagon and trailed under the shapeless bundle that was Mudd Hobbs.

Face down, dressed in a gray shirt and

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

trousers, Mudd lay among a litter of empty feed sacks on the bottom of his wagon. Mudd was dead drunk—as he had been every night for a month.

Mostly because he was too ornery for anybody to live with him, Mudd lived alone in a shack up Dabbit Run. He wasn't popular with Dabbit Runners because he was cruel to his horses and because of his way of living. Mudd never took a bath and he wore his clothes until they fell off.

For five months, beginning with January, Mudd had been cutting stove wood in his wood lot. For the past month, beginning with June, he had been hauling it at the rate of a load a day to Old Man Yancey, who ran the store at Biggers Corners.

As soon as Old Man Yancey paid him, Mudd drove his team two doors down to Birden's Hotel. When he had drunk enough at Birden's bar to put him out on his feet, some of the boys loaded him back into the wagon and his horses took him home.

Wayne turned from the road through the brush that led to Mugger Creek.

He jointed up his rod, put a number twelve Olive Quill on the leader, and cast into a quiet pool. A trout struck, the tiny splash he made seeming to accentuate the silence of the day going to bed in the Dabbit Run hills.

Wayne landed his fish and cast again. He caught another trout and moved down to the next pool.

An early moon rose over Duck Mountain and painted Dabbit Run a shimmering yellow. Two deer, black and sharply outlined in the moonlight, bounded out of a meadow next the creek and went leaping away.

Finally, with a dozen trout in the sugar sack that hung from his neck and served as a creel, Wayne stopped fishing. He climbed back to the road and for a space hesitated.

If Mudd was drunk enough, he wouldn't unharness his team and they'd stand hitched to the wagon all night. But Wayne could go back and see to the horses.

He turned from the road into the stone-littered drive leading to his kitchen door. He stooped, untied the laces of his wet shoes, and kicked them off. His soaked socks were laid on a convenient stone where tomorrow's sun would dry them. Wayne opened the door to enter the house, bending to pick up the wet shoes.

A knife came flashing through the door where he had stood and buried its blade an inch and a half in the wooden pump handle just beyond the door.

WAYNE threw himself flat, and with all the agility he had acquired in a lifetime of ranging the Dabbit Run hills, wriggled inside to the table. He crouched there, silently awaiting the next move from whoever had thrown the knife.

The open door admitted a glancing moonbeam that spread its light obliquely across the kitchen. Beyond that, the room was in shadow. Then a defiant, curiously taut voice spoke.

"Come an' get me! Come get me, hombre! I'm ready for ya."

Wayne spoke softly. "I'll come get you. An' when I do, I'll teach you just what kind of bad manners it is to lay 'round my kitchen tossin' knives at me."

There was a shocked silence. Then, "Wayne! Wayne McCloud! Is that you?"

Wayne said angrily, "Who did you think it might be?"

There was a little rush from the direction of the stove. A slight figure, ridiculously over-dressed in cowboy chaps and a fringed buckskin shirt, hurled itself around the table. It knelt by Wayne. A muffled sob escaped it.

"Oh m'gawsh! Did I hurt ya?"

Wayne rose and brushed himself off with his hands. "I ain't whittled down any. But that ain't your fault. Some day, Tommy, you're gonna try your nonsense on the wrong man an' get hurt yourself."

Tommy Grender was seventeen years old. He lived with his mother on a Dabbit Run farm, and should have spent his time working the farm. Instead he devoured avidly every story of the West he could

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

get, dressed in chaps and a fringed shirt, sported a bowie knife with which he was pretty good, rode his mother's work horses about the Dabbit Run hills, dreamed of the time he could go west, and fancied himself a heller of a man.

"Oh m'gawsh, Wayne," Tommy moaned again. "I didn't know t'was you!"

"Who did you think it was?"

"I thought t'was the posse comin' after me."

"The *what!*"

Wayne put both hands on the boy's shoulders. Tommy was trembling, on the verge of hysteria. Wayne slapped him sharply on the cheek. Tommy relaxed a little. Wayne forced him into a chair. Tommy spoke with an effort.

"I didn't kill old man Yancey."

Wayne was silent. Then, "Is old man Yancey dead?"

"Yeh. He—he is. He was knifed. But I didn't do it. They only thought I did."

"Suppose you start at the beginning an' tell me the hull works," Wayne said.

"IT WAS this way." Tommy eased visibly at this opportunity to unload his troubles on somebody else. "Old Man Yancey owed me six dollars for some work I did. I told him I'd forget it if he'd give me the .38 revolver he's got hangin' over his cash register.

"He says no, he would pay me in money because I didn't know how to handle a revolver. I called him on it, an' we wrangled a bit. This afternoon he give me the six dollars an' told me to beat it.

"I went. I wouldn't want to have it said that I fought a old man like that. Besides, he was right behind me with a broom, so I run.

"I was on the road by Pine Holler when Jed Plummer jumped from behint a apple tree with a shotgun in his hands. 'Stop!' he says. I asked him how come. He says a man as busy as I am prob'ly forgot all about knifin' old man Yancey that afternoon. I said I didn't knife him an' he said the sheriff would see about that.

"About that time I see a passel of men runnin' towards us. I kicked the gun out of Jed's hands an' took to Pine Holler. They followed me, an' as soon as 'twas dark I come straight here. I knew you wouldn't think I ever kilt anybody."

Wayne stared at Tommy, an eager, sensitive kid who had tried to wear off excess spirits in cowboy lingo and action. He shook his head. Tommy might tackle a posse with a bowie knife, but it was impossible to imagine him knifing a harmless old man.

"You get yourself in the darndest messes," Wayne said soberly.

"I know," Tommy lamented. "I thought mebbe you could tell me what I should do."

"I dunno. I'll try. Mebbe, between the two of us— Listen!"

The tread of heavy boots sounded on the front porch. There came a loud rapping on the door. Wayne slipped his feet into a pair of leather moccasins.

"Stay in the kitchen," he whispered. "Don't move."

Wayne shuffled noiselessly through the house to the front door. He opened it. Five men stood on the porch. One was Lem Knowles, the Patten County game warden who dogged Wayne's tracks in the everlasting hope of making an arrest. Another was Bill Horum, Sheriff Cotton's deputy. The rest, Wayne guessed rightly, were hastily conscripted posse men.

"You see anything of young Grender?" Lem Knowles demanded.

"Why no," Wayne said easily. "I ain't seen Tommy in five or six days."

"Suppose you join the posse," Len suggested. "You know these hills like nobody else does, and he's somewhere in 'em."

"What's Tommy done?"

"He knifed old man Yancey this afternoon. He got away with a thousand dollars old man Yancey had. We're goin' to get him. You—"

There came the crash of breaking glass from the kitchen. A deputy yelled. The five streamed past Wayne. In the kitchen the broken window that Tommy had gone through gaped emptily. A posse man shot his flashlight through it to pick up

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Tommy's dodging form a quarter of the way across Wayne's field.

"It's him!" he yelled. "It's Grender!"

Guns began to snap, their orange tongues dimmed by the moonlight. Lem Knowles turned to Wayne.

"So! You haven't seen—"

But Wayne had ducked through the back door and, as fast as he could run, was dodging toward the black fringe of woods at the foot of Duck Mountain.

TOMMY GRENDER hit the woods still running full speed, tripped on a dead log in a hemlock thicket, and sprawled full length in the litter of needles.

Wayne overtook him, stooped beside him, and clapped his hand over Tommy's mouth to quiet Tommy's labored panting. He threw himself down behind the log.

The five members of the posse came to the edge of the hemlocks and stopped. A blade of light stabbed through the hemlocks and turned away. The querulous voice of one of the posse men drifted to Wayne.

"What'll we do? Who would of thought Wayne McCloud could be mixed in this?"

"Watch yourselves," Lem Knowles said calmly. "We can't catch McCloud in the woods at night. He's worse than any weasel."

"What'll we do?" the querulous posse man asked again.

"You three go back to the house," Lem directed. "They have no supplies, and may try to come back for some. Bill and me'll go to Bradby for more men."

Wayne watched them trudge back across the field. He let Tommy Grender up. If Tommy was a man, Wayne could give him six kinds of devilment for breaking and running. But Tommy wasn't a man. He was a scared kid.

"They went away," Tommy whispered. "What now?"

Wayne cursed the wild impulse that had bade him flee with Tommy Grender. Anybody who now believed that Tommy had knifed Old Man Yancey, would believe that Wayne was implicated too. But—

Wayne shrugged.

"It don't make an awful lot of difference what we do," he told Tommy. "Seein' as we can be shot just as easy one place as another, we might as well go to Biggers Corners an' have a look at old man Yancey's store."

Wayne, followed by Tommy, walked cautiously through the hemlocks, jumped the wide trail up Duck Mountain, and continued on an obscure trail made by cattle that found summer pasturage on Duck Mountain and in the wilderness beyond.

The moonlight streaming through the trees made of the trail alternate patches of light and shadow. On top of Duck Mountain the trail widened out. The moon made of it a wide white ribbon wound among the trees. And the moonlight made it possible for Wayne to see the man coming down the trail.

Wayne pressed Tommy into the brush and followed him. The man coming down the trail wasn't a deputy or posse man. Dabbit Run was a big country, and it was only by a far flung chance that a deputy could be posted on this trail with so many hundreds of other trails and highways to cover. The hunt could not be that well organized already.

The man came closer, drew abreast, and Wayne recognized Mudd Hobbs.

Mudd's black beard and hatless head emphasized the nose and dull patch of face showing above the beard. He was dressed in a checkered black-and-white shirt, boots, and dark trousers.

When he had gone by, Wayne slipped from the brush to stare after his retreating figure. He could not place it, but there was something out of place about Mudd as he had come down the trail: something that should not have been there.

There was nothing extraordinary about Mudd's being on Duck Mountain at night; Dabbit Runners tramped the hills as much by night as by day. But hardly three hours ago Wayne had seen Mudd lying in the bottom of his wagon as his horses took him home. Mudd would have had plenty

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of time to get to the top of the mountain since then. But—

There was something wrong.

"Prob'ly took a walk to sober up," Wayne murmured.

Wayne and Tommy Grender continued across the top of Duck Mountain, swung down the other side and up Harbor Mountain, and an hour and a half later stopped on the side hill that overlooked Biggers Corners. The hill was covered with scrubby hemlocks that extended to the town, which was made up of twenty houses, old man Yancey's store, and Birden's Hotel.

Moving more cautiously now, Wayne went three quarters of the way down the hill. Below him, the lights of the houses glowed palely in the moon-bathed valley. He turned to Tommy Grender.

"Stay here," he whispered. "Nobody will come. I'll pick you up right here as soon as I get back. If you ain't here, I won't be able to find you an' the posse'll get you."

Wayne slipped on down the hill. The hemlocks ran right to the back door of old man Yancey's store. Wayne dropped to his stomach and crawled to the door. He tried the knob. The door was locked. He crawled to the other side of the store and looked at a parked car with a state trooper asleep in it.

Wayne melted softly back into the hemlocks. He hadn't expected to find very much by coming to the store. He reached down and shook Tommy Grender's shoulder.

"It's Wayne," he whispered.

"Did you find anything?" Tommy asked eagerly.

"Nothin' to mention. I—"

He raised a hand to caution silence. From far off, toward Wayne's house, there drifted the lonesome bay of a hound. Another hound tuned in with the first. Wayne broke into a trot. The dogs were bloodhounds.

And they were on his trail.

WAYNE could hide his trail from men. But he could hide his trail so carefully that no man could find it, and a hound would still know that he had walked there.

Followed by Tommy, Wayne trotted most of the way back up the mountain and stopped. He calculated coolly. Bloodhounds aren't especially fast trailing dogs. It would take the pair on his trail at least forty-five minutes to get where he stood now.

And there was just one way to shake the hounds from the trail. Water carries no scent. If he and Tommy waded up any stream for a mile or so, the dogs couldn't follow them.

But neither he nor Tommy could walk forever in water, and the men could find where they came out of whatever stream they might enter by leading a hound along the bank. No man could walk as fast in water as he might on land, either.

They couldn't lose their trail in water, but if they could give their pursuers a choice of a half dozen creeks to follow instead of one, they could gain a lot of time. And that, to Wayne, spelled the Craterdon Creeks.

Seven valleys spilled into Craterdon Valley within a few hundred yards, and each of the valleys had a creek coursing down it. By wading up the creek in Craterdon, you could turn into the valley of your choice and the posse would need at least seven bloodhounds in order to be certain which way you had gone.

They had only two. That made the chances seven to two that Wayne and Tommy Grender could select a creek the posse wouldn't, and get far enough back in the hills to give them sufficient breathing spell to cook up something else to do.

Wayne leaped into the creek in Craterdon Valley just as the bloodhounds arrived at the top of the hill leading down to it. He pulled Tommy Grender in behind him and started upstream. The seven valleys tributary to Craterdon, none of which was less than two miles long, entered five from the east and two from the west.

A quarter-mile up, Wayne stopped again. The hounds bayed down to the place where they had entered the creek and stopped

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

there, waking the night with ringing bellows. Wayne looked at the waning moon. It must be shortly past midnight. He turned to Tommy.

"The chances is ten to nothin' Lem Knowles is the coon of that posse," he said thoughtfully. "Lem's a methodical old cuss. Now, what would you do if you was Lem?"

"I'd leave people alone if they didn't do nothin'," Tommy said wistfully.

"It ain't a bad idea," Wayne admitted. "But we ain't bein' left alone, an' it's up to us to do somethin' about it. Lem's got two dogs an' mebbe ten men. Bill Horum an' Lem's the only two amongst 'em as has had any experience huntin' men.

"Neither Bill nor Lem's goin' to take too many chances gettin' anybody else hurt by desperate criminals like us. So they'll each take four men an' a hound.

"One party will go down Craterdon to see if we come out that way. The other will start searchin' up an' down the creeks to the east. They'll take 'em one by one so's not to miss nothin'. When the party that went down comes back, they'll take the two creeks to the west.

"That means each of 'em will travel ten or twelve miles before either comes to Little Bear Creek, which is the last one up on the east. Posses bein' what they are, they won't get there much before an' hour after sunup.

"So little Bear's where we go. We'll wade her to the head, an' sleep until sunup. They'll be tired. Dogs or no dogs, we'll have the jump on 'em."

They waded up Craterdon Creek and turned into Little Bear. Splashing up riffles that boiled about their knees, swimming deep pools and wading shallow ones, they continued. The creek grew smaller the closer they got to its head, and finally became a mere trickle. At last Wayne leaped to the bank.

The quaking aspens, with which Little Bear Valley was covered, sighed and mourned as their leaves bent before the gentle wind that rustled through them. Wayne turned aside for a twenty-foot aspen tree felled beside the creek. He knelt and examined the trunk.

A beaver had cut the tree. A colony of beavers must have moved into Little Bear since the last time he'd been up it six weeks ago. There were more beaver cuttings and finally they came to the dam the beavers had built.

It was a huge pile of sticks plastered together with mud, and it backed up nearly an acre of water. A beaver, hearing them, slapped the water with his tail and dove. Wayne stepped forward and with his hands tore out part of the dam.

Water rushed through the hole he had made. Wayne drew back ten feet and watched. The rush of water diminished as the beavers, working from inside the dam, began to patch the break. Within less than three minutes the rush of water stopped and the hole was patched.

Wayne watched admiringly. Anything any wild animal did had an intense fascination for him.

"We'll curl up on the ground and sleep awhile," Wayne told Tommy. "A tired man ain't half what a rested one is."

"Don't you—don't you sort of think we better move on?" Tommy asked nervously.

"Nope. We'll rest."

"Do you think they'll find our trail tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow," Wayne said succinctly, "is another day. It can be worried about when it gets here."

THE first timid light of dawn was extending a cautious finger across the sky when Wayne woke up. He stretched, and walked down to the beaver dam where he picked and ate a handful of raspberries.

He looked back at Tommy Grender, still sleeping with his head on his arm, and walked a little way out on the dam. The beaver house, a grotesque affair of freshly peeled sticks and mud, rose in the center of the pond.

Wayne turned back toward shore. He was nearly there when a section of the dam crumbled under his feet. With a wild leap Wayne gained the shore and turned to look

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

back at the floating sticks he had dislodged. He gasped. Then he grabbed Tommy Grender by the shoulder and shook him furiously.

"Wha's up?" Tommy mumbled.

"Take it easy," Wayne soothed. "There ain't no posse here yet. You wait here, Tommy. I got business at the Cherry Hill fire tower."

At a distance-eating lope Wayne ran to the head of Little Bear, and up the hill at the head. The Cherry Hill fire tower, a sixty-foot steel skeleton with a cabin on top, reared itself from the knob above Little Bear.

Wayne climbed the stairs to the cabin, snatched up the telephone he found there. Mike DeVere was Lem Knowles' Dabbit Run deputy, and Mike's ring was two long and a short. Wayne rang it.

The receiver to his ear, Wayne counted the clicks that told of Dabbit Run telephones being lifted down so the Dabbit Runners could rubber in on the party line. There was one—two—three—four—five—six. Wayne smiled. Everything was working fine. One of the seven telephones in Dabbit Run belonged to Mudd Hobbs.

And finally Mike DeVere's sleepy voice drifted over the wire.

"Hello?"

"Hello, Mike," Wayne said hurriedly. "This is Lem Knowles. I'm calling from Bradby. I just got word that Wayne McCloud's going to tear out a beaver dam in the head of Little Bear Hollow. Hurry right over there. I'll join you as soon as I can get up."

"But—" Mike protested.

"Hurry now," Wayne commanded, and slammed the receiver down.

At a dead run Wayne returned to the beaver dam.

"Tommy," Wayne said, "I want you to give yourself up."

"What!"

"Which would you rather do, get out of this mess, or go to jail an' take a chance on hangin'?"

"Why get out. But—"

"All right," Wayne said. "The posse should be somewhere close to the mouth of Little Bear about now. You amble back there an' surrender. Tell 'em you couldn't run any more. Tell 'em also, if they want to catch me, to send a few men up to hide around this beaver dam. Say I'm goin' to tear it out some time this mornin' because I hope the water will wash my tracks away."

"I ain't goin' to do it!" Tommy protested indignantly. "I'll give myself up. But I ain't goin' to rat on you."

"You've got to!" Wayne half yelled.

"Well—if you think I should ought to do it."

"I think you ought. Go ahead now. Don't be afraid, an' be sure to tell Lem Knowles I'm goin' to tear this dam out."

DAYLIGHT bloomed full on Little Bear Creek. Ten feet from the border of the dam was a thirty-foot aspen that the beavers had felled within the past day or two. The leaves on it were still fresh.

Wayne crawled to it, burrowed under the trunk, and hid himself with branches plucked from the under portions of the tree. Then, down the creek, he saw three men hurrying along.

They were Lem Knowles, Bill Horum, and Sheriff Henry Cotton himself. These three experienced man-hunters had come on alone. They paused within six feet of the tree under which Wayne lay hidden.

"He hasn't got here yet," Lem Knowles said calmly. "We'll have a nice little surprise all ready for him."

"That's it," Bill Horum said dubiously. "Do you think he'll come?"

"That kid wasn't lyin'," Henry Cotton stated. "He was too scared to."

"It's worth a try," Lem Knowles declared. "I've known Wayne McCloud from years back. He's slipperier'n an oiled eel skin, and fuller of tricks than a broiler is of pin feathers. No tellin' how long or how far we'll have to chase him if we keep after him with dawgs. I dunno why he'd wanna let this dam out, but if he does, somethin's goin' to happen because of it."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"We'll wait," the sheriff decided. "Bill, suppose you cross over and take the other side. Lem, you hang here. I'll go up."

Lem Knowles stared long and hard at the tree under which Wayne lay. Wayne pressed his head a little closer to the ground and wished heartily that it would open to receive him.

An inaudible sigh escaped him as Lem turned away. Lem had been examining the tree as a possible hiding place. Wayne watched him go down to the edge of the dam and crawl under a pile of brush.

Another half hour passed. A big blue heron winged slowly up Little Bear Creek and took a stand at the head of the beaver dam. His bill upraised, he waited for the first unwary frog or tadpole that might come his way. Ten seconds later Mudd Hobbs, sweating and bedraggled, came tearing down the hill.

Plainly Mudd had run most of the way from Dabbit Run. He was still panting heavily as, with a short iron crowbar in his hand, he ran down to the beaver dam and began ripping at one corner of it. Water came spilling over the break he made, and spilled unheeded over his trousers and boots. His checked shirt, the same one he had worn last night, was open.

Mudd stooped, tugged at something in the dam. He straightened, a soaked canvas bag in his hand. From beneath the aspen tree Wayne saw the name on the bag, *Wm. Yancey.*

Mudd started to run. But Lem Knowles had come out from under his brush pile. With his gun dangling from his right hand, he faced Mudd Hobbs.

"What you got there, Mudd?"

Lem ducked aside as Mudd hurled the crowbar. Mudd half slid and half fell back down to the water's edge. Wayne saw Bill Horum coming on the run across the dam. Sheriff Cotton had started down.

"Don't do it, Mudd! If you killed Bill Yancey, come along peaceable. You'll get a fair trial."

"Like hell I'll come!" Mudd Hobbs screamed. "Sure, I killed the old fool! And now—"

A gun gleamed in his hand. Lem Knowles leveled his. But, from the dam, Bill Horum shot first. Mudd Hobbs tumbled into the cold waters of Little Bear Creek.

Sheriff Cotton tore past Wayne's tree to join the two. Together they stood looking down on Mudd Hobbs—whose horses would never again bring him home from Biggers Corners.

"Hello, Lem."

The three whirled as one to see Wayne McCloud sitting calmly on the bank behind them. Lem Knowles flushed. Fifty times he had had Wayne in corners that no man could crawl out of—no man but Wayne.

"I see," Wayne's voice was bitingly sarcastic, "I see you finally got the man that killed old man Yancey."

"What do you know about this?" Lem Knowles demanded.

"Nothin'. Nothin' at all," Wayne assured him pleasantly. "Except I'd feel pretty silly if I was a posse man an' tried to shoot Tommy Grender for somethin' Mudd Hobbs done. You gents goin' to let Tommy go home now?"

"I'll have to hold him for questionin'," Henry Cotton said. "I—"

"Question him at his ma's farm," Wayne said. "Remember, there's an election comin' on. An' if the voters knew the hull story of how you ketched a murderer, they might just haul off an' decide to elect somebody else."

"Well," Henry Cotton said uncomfortably.

TWO hours later Wayne sat across from Tommy Grender at the Grender table. Tommy's mother, all smiles after a terrible night, hovered solicitously about the two of them, heaping Wayne's plate with successive loads of pancakes, sausage, bacon, eggs, and apple pie.

At last Wayne sat back with a contented sigh and loosened his belt. Tommy gazed adoringly into his face.

"How did you prove it wasn't us?" he asked for the fiftieth time. "Please don't keep stallin'. I've *got* to know!"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Wayne cast a cautious eye at Tommy's muddy shirt and chaps. "I'll tell you," he said, "you've got to know all those things if you want to be a good Dabbit Run farmer."

"Do ya?" Tommy's eyes were big with respect.

"Yup," Wayne asserted. "You could of done it yourself if you hadn't spent so much time learnin' to be a cowboy."

"How?"

"Mudd tore out a piece of the beaver dam, an' stuck the money he took down in it so the beavers would built it right into the dam. That was a good idea. But Mudd wanted to make sure that the beavers wouldn't take too long to patch the dam up, so he carried along some sticks for them to work with.

"Now, if you'd spent your time troublin' your head about Dabbit Run, you would of knowed that there ain't a yellow birch within two miles of that dam. So, when you saw that the beavers had used yellow birch to patch their dam, you would have been suspicious that a man carried it there."

"Gee!" Tommy said.

Wayne continued, "An', if you'd seen Mudd's horses takin' him home drunk like I did last evenin', you wouldn't of thought much about it if you'd seen the same thing every night for a month. You wouldn't even have looked close at Mudd. But you would have noticed that he had a gray shirt on.

"Then, if you had met him on top of Duck Mountain last night dressed in a black an' white checkered shirt, you might have started to get a bit leery of things—Mudd bein' a man as wouldn't change his shirt more'n once every two months.

"After you saw how somebody had hid somethin' in the dam, you could have begun to think how Mudd might have spent most of the day at Birden's, not drinkin' as much as he pretended to. The boys could have loaded him onto the wagon, an' every one of them would swear that he was too drunk to sit up.

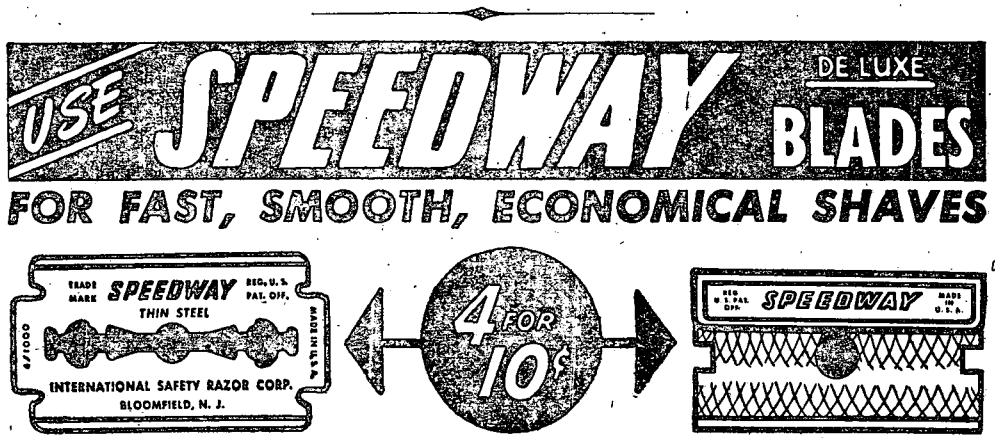
"But, when Mudd got half a mile up the road, he could have put his clothes on a dummy he had hidden under some feed sacks. The horses would go home if he was on the wagon or if he wasn't.

"Mudd could have cut into the woods, come down in the hemlocks back of Yancey's store, looked in an' seen you arguin' with old man Yancey. Then, after you had gone, he could—an' did—slip in an' knife old man Yancey an' take the money.

"You could have figured all those things out if you had studied some on how to be a Dabbit Run farmer."

"Gee whiz!" Tommy exclaimed. "Gosh!"

And Wayne knew, when he started down the road toward his house, that from now on Tommy Grender would no longer think the West was the only possible goal for his bubbling energy.



PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Harp and the Blade

By JOHN MYERS MYERS

CHAPTER XXXIV

ABBEY IN ARMS

THE next two weeks were fine ones for me. I was in almost continuous, purposeful action and the physical weariness I knew by nightfall only added to my sense of accomplishment.

Through it all, indeed, I experienced a sensation that nothing but the writing of poetry had previously given me. I was achieving something at once spiritual and concrete, and had knowledge of what I was doing while I was doing it.

It was a new existence that I was isolating and fortifying for myself. In the little nation which Conan was consolidating I was recognized as his alter ego, second only to him in authority, and I drove myself mercilessly to make sure I earned my rating.

What we had to do in the short time before hostilities was to visit friends and waverers, giving them final notice of the conflict and its significance. With the friends all we tried to do was to show how confident we felt. As for those as yet undecided, we made capital of our new alliance with the abbey, how we had just killed Oliver before Chilbert's eyes, and one more thing. In essence this was that when we were victorious we would remember who had helped us—and who hadn't.

Sometimes Conan and I traveled together. More often I acted independently, leading my little troop of followers to outlying strongholds to palaver and take careful note. Word of the business at the Old Farms and the work at Gregory's had got around attached to my name, and I was well received even by the hesitating.

Never a diffident man, I entered all places with a new and surer confidence. All knew that I had power in the land.

That was pleasant, and the fact that my followers liked me was better. But what really made the world gay with promise was the thought of Marie. She was always in my mind. At night when my mission had been disposed of I had little to say over my wine in the brief interval before fatigue sent me to bed. I would sit holding her in my thoughts, marveling that there could be a future which might house us together.

Once when Conan and I made a trip together night caught us in the forest. We were all tired men there by the fire, but I was happy with the friendship I bore them, especially one. And I was happy with the thought of having a home in a land where men looked up to me, a home with a woman in it who'd bear me a son. Conan, son of Finnian, men would call that boy.

But that was further away. The girl's warm beauty was with me there. She was a darling to whom I would be good because no other course was conceivable. It was a great and strange thing to come to after my years of wandering as a lone hand.

The first installment of this seven-part serial, herein concluded, appeared in the Argosy for June 22

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THINKING of her so, I sang as I had not for years, if I had ever thus sung before. It was a song I had made for a chief's wedding once, and the passion I had tried to put into the words was a moving actuality in my voice. The song was in Irish, but the men did not need to be told what it was about. They listened soberly, each staring at the fire and thinking of his own woman.

Midir's finding of Etain after she had been lost to him for several mortal lifetimes was the subject.

She was lost, she was gone,
His darling, his sweeting,
And time maundered on,
Yielding no other meeting.
No meeting of lips, no smiles, no embraces,
No charming his eyes with that face of all faces.

She was stolen by art,
Tricked from him by magic,
His winsome sweetheart;
And his godhead was tragic.
Yes, tragic to know that no kindly morrow
Could cut short his life to free him of sorrow.

"I will find her again!"
His heart cried, but: "Never!"
His brain muttered then,
"Once she's lost, gone forever!"
Forever long gone, the voice that would bless him;
Gone the slim arms that would hold and caress him.

Night and day all alone
He wandered then, broken,
Each minute a stone
Crushing hope by its token;
A token of love's final no—she had perished;
Dead, the small, lovely one whom his heart cherished.

But he looked for her still
For the cheat hope-giving
To lessen the chill
Of the need to keep living.
The living though lifeless while she was missing,
The sweet, the kind one no more for his kissing.

But it happened one day!
Fate softened; he found her,
Though still the spell lay
On her spirit and bound her.
It bound her, kept her from knowing her nearest,
Her lover, her friend, her heart's case, her dearest.

By his sleights, with his skill
He won her back, breaking
The charms a dire will
Had spun, banning her waking.
Awakening to old joy, heart and lips mated,
Giving the healing he'd hopelessly waited.

When I had finished and Conan roused from his thoughts of Ann, I could tell by his face that he knew that I had not sung that song merely because I'd felt like singing. Whether or not he had guessed before, he knew then that something had happened to me, and he asked me a question that, I am sure, had long been on his mind.

"You will stay with us, brother? There will be plenty of land if we win, and chiefs will be needed."

I looked at the fire instead of at him. "I might throw up a hall of my own if I could find a woman to put in it. Not much use of one without the other."

Of course, he knew the woman I had in mind as well as I; but I wouldn't name her, so he couldn't.

He put his hand on my shoulder an instant in that warming way he had. "You might find one that wouldn't know any better."

"One took you," I retorted, "so no man should give up hope." We turned in shortly after that, but the dreams of good days to come followed me into my sleep.

AS FOR Marie herself, however, I scarcely saw her in all that time. I was only at the fort briefly, and then only to make a report or get a few hours of needed rest. Everybody was working furiously, the women as well as the men, to get ready for the expedition or seige, whichever it was to be.

On the two occasions when I managed a few words alone with her she was unwontedly shy and hesitant, and I was sure that Ann and she had been talking things over. But I said nothing particular to her, for it was no time for courtship. There was

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

too much to be done; and also there was little use in talking now until and if I should find myself a survivor of the onrushing war.

As it turned out, I couldn't even say farewell to her when hostilities were renewed. The news was sudden and desperate when we got it. Conan and I had met at a rendezvous to discuss our success when a rider approached on a horse which had worked to get him there.

"A man came from the abbey this morning, Conan," the fellow's news ran. "Chilbert's attacking them with all the men he can round up! His riders were over the border when the messenger left."

We calculated. "Some of them could be at the abbey now," Conan said, "but not the main body of his horsemen; and his foot troops will be another day and a half behind."

"At that they'll be there before ours," I said.

"By some few hours," he agreed thoughtfully, "and naturally they won't want to wait around for us. The abbot may need every man we can rush."

He chewed his lip a moment then rose, having made his decision. "We'll send them to him anyhow. Finnian, you'd better take the men with us, pick up what mounted men you can without going too much out of the way, and ride to the abbey. The abbot won't waver, but the moral effect on the others will be bad if Chilbert arrives and there is no tangible evidence of our support."

"Right," I said, preparing to mount.

He was moving toward his own horse. "Rainault and Jean will have dispatched the muster call everywhere by now, so we ought to be under way by noon tomorrow. Send if you see there's real need for hurry when you get there. Otherwise I'll coddle the men and let them save their energy for fighting."

"All right. Give my love to Ann and so on."

"I will." He smiled. "Especially to so on. See you at the abbey, and don't kill Chilbert before I get there."

"Not if he behaves himself," I promised as we saluted and turned to go separate ways.

So for the third time I approached St. Charles Abbey, thinking sadly and bitterly that this time no Father Clovis would stand above the gates to bandy words with me. On this visit I was not halted and questioned at all. One of the monks who had been with us on the raid against Oliver was on guard. He hailed me excitedly from a distance, and the gates were wide and welcoming when we arrived.

IT WAS just after sun up, but the court was noisily abustle, swarming with monks, the troops of chiefs who held their land from the abbey, and refugee villeins. Under other circumstances the presence of so many women and squawling brats in a monastery would have been a scandal of dimensions.

The abbot and I greeted each other like the old friends we were coming to consider ourselves. "Good," he said when I had told him that Conan would follow with his full strength. "Come on up on the wall, and I'll show you the smoke from their fires. They're not cooking fires, either," he added grimly when we'd climbed aloft, "unless they've left men to burn inside their own homes. They do that sometimes."

"So I've heard." I grimaced. There was no doubt but that Chilbert would use every cruel trick in his reputedly extensive repertoire to frighten people either into flight or into volunteering abject submission to him.

"We had a brush with their vanguard yesterday evening," he continued, "but they didn't essay a serious attack. They were trying to lure us back toward their main army, whereas our strategy is to keep out of a major engagement until Conan joins us. But Chilbert, I take it for granted, has had us well scouted and will make at least one big effort before Conan arrives."

From my observation of Chilbert at Oliver's fort I judged him a man who knew his way all around a battlefield. "He'll try," I agreed, "although if his footmen

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

don't get here by dark they may wake up to find all our men here, too. Shall I chase a man back to tell Conan to rush his horsemen?"

"I'll send someone," he said. "Let your men and their mounts rest up now."

That, after all, was sound advice, and I took it.

After seeing that my men had food and a place to bunk I napped a few hours myself, but I was up before noon. A troop that had been out scouting was just entering the gate, and I went over to listen while they made their report to the abbot. They hadn't caught sight of any foot soldiers yet, but they had seen two or three times more horsemen than had been around the day before.

"And there are doubtless a good few you didn't see," the abbot said. "Are they mostly encamped or are they on the move to any particular point?"

"Most of them are to east of us, though I'm not positive they're massing for attack from that point." The fellow shook his head. "The woods is sure full of them!"

"The woods is a good place for them; let them stay there," said the prelate.

But they didn't take advantage of his permission very long.

A small group of monks had been stationed a half-mile off by the nest of little houses which belonged to the villeins. Seemingly the leader of the enemy vanguard had looked the situation over and decided he could sweep away the defenders and fire the huts before we could mount and intercept. For the scouts were just taking their horses to the stables when a guard on the walls cried: "Raid! They're raiding the cabins!"

"Many?" the abbot snapped.

"Lots more than our outpost there."

The churchman ran to look for himself while I sped to collect my men. They and lot more were tumbling down out of the loft where they'd been taking their ease, and everybody started scrambling and jostling to get his horse out into the court.

"More of them!" the watcher informed us hysterically. "As many again!"

CHAPTER XXXV

GREETINGS FROM THE ENEMY

THIS was evidently going to be a real battle, but the abbot was notably deliberate. He ordered men to their positions on the wall before he dispatched any to support the fathers by the shacks.

I had fished my followers from the crowd expeditiously and had them marshalled, waiting. But the reserves had already gone before the abbot turned to me.

"Will you stay close at hand outside, Finnian? We won't need any more men yonder."

Some of my fellows, keyed up for fighting, began to grumble, but I silenced them. This was the abbot's hold, and he was in command. Still I didn't want to miss what was going on, and I led the way swiftly to a point whence our view of the proceedings was complete.

The two large bodies of enemy horsemen were separated from each other by about a furlong. Estimating their numbers, I clicked my tongue. They'd outnumber those we had defending the position by a tremendous margin. In fact, without depleting our garrison we simply couldn't match them in numbers.

I looked at the abbot, but he was following developments with stolid interest. And yet instead of withdrawing what was only intended as a skirmishing force from the path of the enemy's mounted army, he had ordered out patently inadequate support. It made me nervous; but he was a man who didn't do things without having a reason, so I watched further.

For a while it looked like a race as to which side would reach the cabins first, then it seemed to me that the invaders were slowing, deliberately letting our men beat them out. Only at that moment, so large and sudden had been the excitement, did I get around to realizing that the destruction of the shacks was not worth such a great effort on Chilbert's part. And a careful look at the rear body showed me that it was swinging toward the abbey itself.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

My trust in the prelate had so far not been misplaced. He had foreseen the enemy's maneuver, and since he'd carefully played up to it, I assumed he had some countermove in mind. It would have to be a good one, for Chilbert's thrust could be terribly disastrous to us.

Naturally anybody could now see what they were up to, and they couldn't actually get to the gates ahead of our retreating men. Not ahead of the first men, that is. But only two or three could ride in abreast, and while the rest were waiting their turn the foe could reap them with a charge.

Certainly they thought our fellows would run for it, for all at once even the leading raiders gave up pretense of driving toward the cabins and raced for the gates. That many of them we could beat back, saving our fleeing men by a sortie, but in the time required to do so their reserves could have a crack at storming the weakly defended walls.

I glanced at the abbot again to find he was looking my way. "Feign flight," he called down, "but stand off on the other side of the fort where they can't see you. Then when they arrive do whatever seems reasonable."

JUST after we'd taken our station I heard the hooves pounding, then blown horses snuffling before the gates. Sweeping all the way from the woods east, they'd had a long sprint, and undoubtedly they'd been pushed hard all day.

"The fools stayed where they were! We've cut 'em off!" a voice I knew cried. The speaker was Chilbert himself.

"And now what are you going to do?" the abbot asked him calmly.

The count laughed exultantly. "Chop 'em into bits while you watch!"

"How are you going to catch them on those tired nags of yours?" the churchman asked contemptuously. "By the time you race back you won't be able to run down a badger."

The second section of raiders was galloping up, the sounds told us. "Hey, Chilbert," one of them called, "those fellows never even tried to make it here. They must have some reason for staying outside, eh?"

I had finally figured out the answer to that one, and Chilbert, with his general's eye, would grasp it on the instant now that he'd paused to take stock.

Taking a fort like the abbey was nothing that a man could do with one hand. If he dismounted enough men to make the effort a good one, the riders hovering around could charge in to raise the devil with him and drive off his horses. Still, having swooped on the fort with such dramatic speed, he couldn't leave without making some sort of gesture.

"Come on," he said angrily after naming the several men he wanted to accompany him, "we'll look this box over."

When I heard that man riding toward the side of the abbey where I was skulking I knew just how I'd fill in the abbot's blank orders. Passing the word, I plunged for the corner and got there just in time to hit the little knot of reconnoiterers.

Surprise!

I made a vicious cut at the count himself, but the great bay saved him, rearing and whirling out of the ruck with amazing agility. Chilbert saw me, and the sudden recognition in his eyes was pure hate if I have ever looked on it. He tried to swing his mount back toward me, but the horse had been badly startled; and he could do nothing for a second against its frightened strength.

It and two more horses, one riderless, caromed into the rest, and that was all we really accomplished before we galloped away. But the effect, if far from overwhelming, was good. By making the count flounder helplessly within a thumbed nose of his own men we had augmented their uneasy bafflement.

Some of them broke ranks to follow us but desisted at Chilbert's savagely voiced command. He had more important projects in mind, and, looking back, I could see him grimly resume his tour of the fort. That completed, he merely ordered his men to stay where they were and remain alert.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

HE WAS not so badly off at that. He had been permitted to bring his army up in good order and to mass it before the gates, effectively sealing the abbey. If his footmen arrived before our reserves, he need not fear a sortie.

As for my men and the monks without the walls, we'd be in trouble then no matter what we did. If we left to harry the foot troops, his horsemen would have a free hand to storm the stronghold.

But I still approved the abbot's strategy. He was achieving the delay he wanted; and in the minor matter of the villein's cabins he had scored, having so far secured them from damage.

So balanced, each side hoping for the help that would mean decisive power, we passed a bitterly long afternoon. I spent the first part of it with my head over my shoulder, looking for allies, and the second with an eye on Chilbert lest he try to snap me up in a surprise move.

With several hours in which to recuperate, his horses might be ready for another swift charge. He wouldn't abandon his strategic position, but a picked troop might bag my worst-mounted men if I allowed it to get the jump on us.

Whether Chilbert actually contemplated such an attack I don't know, for a shout from the wall did away with that interlude's suspense. "Men from the west!" a monk cried joyfully. "Riders!"

With a yelp of pleasure and a sigh of relief, I turned to see. That would be our own vanguard sifting out of the woods in satisfying numbers. I looked excitedly toward the foe again, but, of course, Chilbert, his advantage nullified, was preparing to leave.

The newcomers were led by Conan himself, and when I saw that I hastened to meet him. "I thought I'd better come along with the van to make sure you weren't bungling the business," he greeted me.

"You might as well have stayed home," I told him. "Why we had Chilbert trapped right between us, and—"

He appraised the size of Chilbert's departing force. "Trapped?"

"Safe as a bear with its tail in the ice."

"Anything really happen?" he wanted to know.

"Mostly scouting and maneuvering so far, but if he finds his foot troops in amongst those trees there he'll maybe be back again."

"Jean should have ours here some time in the morning," he said, "and the rest of our horse should be along by dark tonight."

"The abbot would like to hear about that," I suggested, and we cantered toward the gates.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE TYRANT'S AX

THOSE men Chilbert was awaiting did arrive, our scouts reported, but by then night was coming on. So while we did not relax vigilance, we set our minds forward to plan for the morning. Night is only an aid to an attacker if he be unexpected.

At once conferring and observing, a group of us could see the long line of the enemy camp-fires flare up one by one against the black rim of the forest. To westward a similar but much smaller series of blazes showed where our own troops were bivouacked.

Conan turned to the abbot. "I'll harry them and squeeze them against your walls as best I may; but I don't want to get tied up in a real melee till my walking boys come along."

"Understood." The abbot nodded. "They've got to have adequate horse support when they come into the open."

As we were riding to join our followers a little later, Conan broke a thoughtful silence. "They've got more men than I figured they could muster. Chilbert must be reaching way out east."

"They have a lot more than I'd like them to," I said. "We'll have plenty to do trying to check them until the rest of our army arrives—and maybe after that. Still they'll be well occupied trying to take the abbey."

"Perhaps. The walls are strong enough,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

but that place was built as a house of God first and only fortified as an afterthought when times got nasty. There's neither hill, water, nor rock to abet the defenses. It just sits there like an egg laid on a flat stone. We're lucky there's a tough chick inside."

"There could be better locations," I admitted. "That level sweep on the north side is an invitation for attackers to gather around and put up scaling ladders."

"That's where they'll operate from in the main," he agreed. "Though if it's a clear day they may try the east wall first while the sun's low enough to be in the monks' eyes."

We were up when night started to fade. There was no rain, but it was going to be a gray day. "That means we take our stand to the north," Conan said as we wolfed our breakfast. "And I don't think they'll keep us waiting long."

The only moving things in a dim forest, we were drifting toward our post when a scout's report vindicated my friend's prophecy. The foe was preparing to move, and we speeded up in order to be ready for them. Because of the murk we couldn't yet see them when we reached the clearing, and even the abbey looked to be no more than a curious arrangement of clouds.

We remained in the deeper obscurity under the trees and held our gazes eastward with the patience of sure expectation. The visibility improved rapidly, but our ears first gave notice of their proximity. Soon then we saw a great wave of them coming over a little rise, mounted men on each side of files of footmen, and another following as the first spilled down into a hollow.

It was while they were emerging from this to the level on which the abbey stood that we met them. They were forcing their horses, but we had the advantage of riding down hill at them.

WE DIDN'T try to strike their entire front with our inferior numbers, instead we attempted to fold up the nearest flank with the force of a phalanx hammering the wings of successive separated lines.

It worked well, but all I can clearly remember is feeling my shield jarred by blows and seeing some of the enemy tumble to the ground. Then we were through them, completing a semi-circle in our race back to the woods. If they wanted to follow us and put off the storming, well and good.

Some probably were for doing it, but Chilbert bawled orders to close ranks and keep on toward the monastery. Seeing that this was the case, we gathered again, cut an arc through the forest so as to be opposite the vulnerable wall, and approached to see what precautions Chilbert had taken against us.

Chilbert's mounted troops had been augmented, too, since the previous day, and he could afford a considerable force to keep us from climbing on his back while he assailed the abbey. Having spotted us, they were prancing forward to be ready for us if we should choose to strike into the open again. Then we suddenly recognized their leader.

The sight of him was too much for Conan's usually cool head. "Gregory!" he shouted, surging forward with all of us pell-mell at his heels. "Do you remember me, kinsman?"

No vituperation could have added anything to what was implied in Conan's tone, and Gregory felt the full, savage impact of it. Perhaps the disastrous results of his original betrayal had made him superstitious. At any rate, he was an awed and miserable man who did not want to meet Conan. Instead of giving the word to countercharge, as his men were expecting, he just sat there, vaguely fingering a sword he wasn't going to draw.

Then suddenly Conan's imminence was too much for Gregory. He whirled and bolted right through his own men, spreading panic as he went. It was a rout almost before we hit them.

Those we couldn't catch to slay fled toward their main body, with Gregory leading them by two lengths. And so it happened that an army which had every right to think it was comfortably protected turned,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

startled, to find its rear guard thundering toward it in flight.

Chilbert, who had been directing preparations for the attack from behind the main lines, swung around, wild-eyed, and roared for them to halt. As I knocked a man from his horse and looked forward for another victim, I witnessed an irony whose dimensions I could not then spare the leisure to appreciate.

Quickly appraising the extent of the danger, and as swiftly discerning its source, the count dashed to intercept his fleeting lieutenant. As the latter perforce drew rein and hastily started to fabricate explanations, Chilbert heaved up the great ax he was carrying. Without even bothering to curse Gregory, Chilbert delivered a blow which cleft the man's steel cap and drove deep into his chest.

BUT no measures were stern enough to stop that flight immediately, and Chilbert himself had to side-step or be run down. He tried to make the rest of his followers divide and let the rear guard through, then close in on us as we followed. But it was too late, and the stampeded men ran on to smash in among the ranks of their fellows and ride down comrades afoot.

We were an organized body; their ranks were broken and the men had to shift for themselves. And where they wanted to shift was out of our way. We on our part could no longer retreat. We had to have the wall at our backs before we halted and reversed our direction.

We gained the wall without difficulty, but in so doing we sacrificed the momentum that had been our most potent weapon. Nor could we hope to pick it up again on the charge back. By the time we'd turned to face them they were beginning to form ranks against us once more.

Still, though their numbers were much greater than ours, they were still too disorganized to be of great danger to us for a few minutes. And if the abbot was the man I thought he was, this period of their disorganization would not be passed by.

Everything had happened so rapidly, with results as amazing to us as to them, that until the moment of our turning I hadn't entirely comprehended what a lucky blow we had struck. Having their rear guard routed almost before it took the field must have convinced them that they faced an irresistible power. There must have been something peculiarly unnerving, too, in the experience of being ridden down by their own comrades.

With the wall to keep us from being bothered from the rear, we were able to form an effective wedge and had no trouble in beating off such badly knit groups as tried to crush us.

Elsewhere, however, Chilbert was doing a masterful job of reestablishing morale. A magnificent figure on his great horse, he was savagely dominant. He bullied them into renewed aggressiveness. I think most of them were more afraid of that one man than they were of all of us, their avowed enemies.

Conan had his ear cocked, his face alert. "He'll come," I said confidently. Then we heard it.

"Domino gloria!" rang the cry from off to our left, and we knew the monks were boiling out to hammer the enemy into greater uncertainty.

"Come on!" Conan yelled, and we started boring into the mass, hewing furiously.

We were taking a line that would, we believed, unite us with the priests. If our two forces succeeded in meeting, the havoc already accomplished would be great. And once combined we would be in position to tear even wider holes in their divided array.

Chilbert appreciated the situation, of course, and he rushed group after group into the shrinking space between us. The very fellows who were nipping at our heels were called off to take their places in the wedge he was driving.

With each yard or so, therefore, the opposition was growing more stubborn. They were the larger force, and now their numbers began to tell; we could no longer depend on swift, decisive action.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WITH that impatience with fact familiar to desperate need I wondered why things that were going to happen couldn't happen when they would be of some use. Now was the moment for Jean to appear. The foe could spare no horsemen to rip into his men, and those men would supply just the added weight we wanted.

But Jean didn't come, and Chilbert put yet more pressure on us. Satisfied with his marshaling efforts, he was at length ready to take personal part in the battle; and he waved his heavy ax, shouting for men to follow.

After a while, a tiring, winded man, I was no longer sanguine as to the outcome. We were practically stopped, and unless the monks were more successful the enemy might pin us back against the fort and whittle us down. I listened as best I could, but the abbot's deep, certain voice seemed no nearer.

Nevertheless, we were holding our own, if no longer accomplishing any more than that, as long as we could keep from being crushed and scattered there was hope that we could wear them down. And then if our foot troops arrived . . .

Meanwhile the count was working his way along the battle front. He was striking an occasional blow, but mostly he was searching for something. From the vicious delight of his expression I knew what that something was when Conan abruptly plunged toward him with a challenging cry. Each of them had the same idea, arrived at for the same reason: to kill the other would be at least half as good as winning the battle.

But fighting a picked man in a melee is difficult to do. It so happened that when Chilbert was finally able to sweep toward us in a surge of men and horses it was I that first encountered him.

I slashed at him, missed him for the second time in two days, and cut short my curses to duck under his ax. It sounded like a high wind as it passed my ear. By the time I was ready to strike again he wasn't the man I struck. We had been parted in the turmoil—he was elsewhere.

Some yards to my left Conan and Chilbert had at last succeeded in meeting and were struggling at once with their horses and each other. I began to fight my way toward them, but too many others were essaying to do the same thing for me to make swift headway. At such instants as I could spare from defending myself I watched a duel in which both men were hampered by the crush. They would be forced apart, then come together again, roaring for their respective followers to make room.

Skill at horsemanship was naturally discounted by the circumstances, but at that the bay nearly ended the fight. To my horror I saw him rear up and overbear Conan's mount which staggered and fell back on its haunches. This was Chilbert's moment, and he took a full, two-handed swing with all his tremendous might.

I felt as I had once felt when a wave had picked me off a Viking ship and, before I knew it was going to, put me back. But Conan, instead of trying to keep his seat, had used his hands to vault backward and slide toward the rump. The blow that would have sliced him as a similar one had split Gregory landed instead on the half-stunned, struggling horse.

The moment that it took Chilbert to pull his weapon from the collapsing animal was his bad luck. Conan stretched out a hand to grip the ax's handle, and so used Chilbert's own strength to keep from being rolled on by his dead mount.

With a mighty wrench the count pulled his weapon out of the animal and away from Conan's grasp, but by then my friend was braced, one foot on the ground and one foot on his fallen horse. Now it was he who was in a position for an overhead, two-handed sweep.

He had the start of Chilbert by just that trifling edge that matters. He hewed at the count's left arm where it showed beyond the shield, and slashed again to lay open the thigh. His foeman tried to swing his ax with one hand, but it was easily warded. Conan's answering cut took Chilbert in the face, and the combat was over.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CHAPTER XXXVII

MASTERLESS MEN

WHETHER Chilbert was dead when he fell to the ground, or whether some horse's hoof ground out what life was left in him nobody knew, and we were all too busy to find out.

Chilbert's men were at first even too maddened to feel dismay at his loss. They surged at us in a furious effort to ride Conan under; we flung ourselves in front of him; and there were a few bloody moments before he was safely remounted on a masterless horse.

Once in the saddle he started to shout: "Chilbert's dead!" And we all took up the cry. "Chilbert's dead!"

This was not merely a boast of triumph; its purpose was to tell the count's men they were leaderless, to make them begin to wonder what they were going to do. It turned out that they weren't going to do very much. When we drove at them again, they commenced retreating; and I could hear the abbot absolving the souls of the men he slew as he moved steadily nearer.

We chased them, but, once they had broken, our object was not to kill. Conan and I stopped soon, watching the flight and trying to realize that it was all over. After a few minutes we were joined by the prelate. He, too, was dazed by the suddenness of victory.

"Well, it's done," he said. "With Chilbert slain they won't have another try at us."

"No," Conan agreed.

We lapsed into the inertia that follows completed violence. "I still don't see how it happened," the churchman said then.

"It was one of those things." Conan tried to spit, but his mouth was too dry. "If there'd been any other man leading the rear guard it would have been different."

"Who was he? I saw Chilbert kill him, but I didn't get a good look at him."

"Gregory," I said.

The abbot's eyes grew round. I had never seen him laugh before, but he did then. "How Clovis would have enjoyed that," he remarked wistfully, and all three of us gave a thought to that man before he spoke again. "So Gregory didn't want to meet you?"

"No, but as I couldn't foresee that, I didn't really have any business charging him before the rest of his army was occupied with you in the abbey. Then when he turned, one thing led to another. At that, I wouldn't have followed in so deeply if I hadn't been sure of you."

The abbot accepted the tribute with a gesture. "Chilbert, though I don't say he deserved better fortune, surely had a right to count on it. I thought for a while we'd be lucky to get off with a draw."

"He was a capable scoundrel," I said, and we let that stand for his epitaph.

WE LOOKED around. All of the enemy who could manage it were out of sight, together with most of our men, although some of the latter had hung back from the pursuit to round up riderless mounts. The people who'd been left in the monastery were out gathering the wounded. The abbot sighed.

"Before we have to find out how much in the way of friends and man power this victory has cost us—"

"And how many women we'll have to tell that they'd better start looking for another man," Conan took him up soberly.

"Yes, before that, too, and so while our only positive knowledge is of good, let us go over to that tree," he pointed to an isolated oak, "and sit quietly to think of this new power we have."

With those words he was no longer a comrade in arms but an older man and a priest. "A good idea, father," I said, using the term of respect for the first time since he had shown us Clovis' head.

We dismounted to let our horses graze where they would. It wasn't a far walk to the abbey, and they had earned their leisure. We stretched out in the shade, only then realizing how worn we were. All of us had sundry nicks, scratches, and cuts of varying length and depth; but in view of what we had come through they

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

didn't seem worth a great deal of thought.

In a moment or so, however, the abbot sat up, unbuckled his sword, and threw it from him. "It's a futile hope in times like ours, but I trust I'll never have to use that again. In any case I won't have to use it as much from now on. There will be respites, and I can build as I have never had time to do before. The abbey will start to house scholars instead of soldiers as soon as I can find the men to teach."

I raised up on one elbow. "I know the man for you!" I said excitedly, and launched into an enthusiastic description of Father Michael. "He's the one to teach your teachers," I concluded. "I've met scholars in my time but never one to touch him. And he's wasted there, breaking his heart among louts who don't know a poem from a papal bull."

He eyed me with paternal indulgence. "There are more things to scholarship than poetry."

I shrugged. He was a churchman, and in any event he had a right to his own opinion. I even had the caution to refrain from telling him that Father Michael did not think so. "But he's your man," I said earnestly. "You'll never find a better."

"I'll send over to see if he will come," he promised. "What will you take from our success, Conan? Will you seize Chilbert's land? The abbey wants none of it."

"Nor do I, father," my friend said. He rolled over on his stomach, selected a piece of grass, and started chewing it. "I'll offer alliance and what protection I can give to any man who wants to hold from me, but I'm not a conqueror. I have land, and there's room enough for my friends to live uncrowded now that the master land-grabber has been done away with.

"Like yourself I know I'll have to fight again, but I'm stronger now. It'll take a great army to take that fort of mine, and nobody can stay long in my country who cannot take it. I'll have my friends build with stone, too, and in the shadow of those stone forts our people will be safe, assured that when they marry the roof will stay above the heads of their wives and children."

His clenched hand hit the ground. "I'm only a chief because I can give them that thing as other men cannot or will not."

"Excellent, my son." The abbot nodded, turning his attention to me. "And what will you do now, Finnian?" His eyes twinkled. "I recall that on the occasion of our first meeting you would have none of us. Will you find a place here to suit your requirements?"

Having no such claims in the direction of constructive benevolence as they, I was a little embarrassed, but Conan saved me. "Of course, father. We'll find him a place off in the woods where everybody will be safe from hearing his harp and songs."

The prelate smiled in recognition of the intent rather than in appreciation of the jest. "And now," he said, shifting to a kneeling position, "as men who have been granted good fortune by God today, let us offer a prayer."

We followed the Latin with him until he became largely silent with more personal communication, only a mumbled word or so conveying the general tenor. From similar murmurings I knew that Conan was also praying. I thought of Marie instead, which perhaps came to the same thing, involving as it did contemplation of the summum bonum.

WE HAD finished, and the abbot was retrieving his sword in sign that he was ready to leave when I noticed Conan's foot soldiers, already emerged from the forest and marching sturdily toward the abbey. A knot of horsemen led them, and I could make out Jean at their head. I nudged Conan, and we stretched out again, chuckling.

"Jean!" Conan bawled.

He located us after peering, halted his men, and trotted across fields. The abbot, seeing that we were not for immediate going, saluted us and strode off. We watched him approvingly, then grinned lazily up at Jean, who reined in to stare, nonplussed.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Hello, Jean; what are you doing in these parts?" I wondered.

He scratched his head, knowing that something was going on but not sure what. "Where's the war?" he asked finally.

Conan and I looked at each other. "Did you hear of any wars around here, Finnian?" my friend asked curiously.

"No." I yawned. "Somebody must have given him the wrong directions."

"Sure," Jean said, pointing to a corpse about a hundred yards away, "and I suppose he's just a landmark."

"Oh," Conan drawled, "you mean *that* war. Hell, that war's all over!"

Jean gulped and goggled at us, unable to assimilate this. "It *is?*"

"It is."

"You mean to say I had to yahoo those poor devils afoot all through a moonless night," Jean, a harried man who had had no sleep, was angry now, "and you couldn't even wait till we got here before you finished up the war?"

"I'm sorry, Jean," I apologized. "We just didn't know our own strength."

That and the look on his face finished us. We turned over on our stomachs and writhed in a great joy of laughter. Then after another indignant second his own usually ready guffaw resounded to swell the chorus. It was well, for we needed that laugh. Soon we rose to attend to the bitter business of seeing who was lost, crippled for life, or maimed in some lesser degree.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

FINNIAN, WILL YOU ROAM?

IT WAS over another week before we turned home again. The military rout was complete, but to insure against combines of chiefs who might try later reprisals we visited the more important ones. To the amenable we promised protection and alliance, to the sullen we pointed out that they had got off easily but wouldn't next time.

True to his word, Conan seized no occupied land, but all empty and doubtful country contiguous to his borders he preempted. His purpose was to settle it, establishing a fortified buffer to give pause to later aggressors.

He did not even confiscate any of Chilbert's mobile property as indemnity, though we did raze his fortress as an object lesson. Then we made sure that his land was partitioned among five men, so guaranteeing that none would fall heir to dangerously heady wealth.

The endless conferences were a bore, but a necessary bore. By showing men the dirt we could rub their noses in, we made, if not friends, resigned enemies who congratulated themselves that things were no worse. Some might be friends later, others not; but all were impressed. Our power was a by-word, and it would take some outsider of reputation to rally local men against us.

Such an antagonist might and would eventually materialize, but in the interim our might would be increased. There's nothing like proof that one can gut a man to inspire him with consideration for one. Only the few like courtesy for its own sake.

Notwithstanding the swank, heavy politics, and monotony, I wasn't unhappy. Indeed, though I did my part reasonably well, I believe, I was in a trance of anticipation the whole time. I functioned by rote, and my life was elsewhere. Conan noticed and gibed me about it, though he, too, was chafing with impatience to get home.

Then the great moment came when we actually started for the fort. And brutes we were about it, pushing tired men to the limit of their endurance and almost beyond, nagging and cursing everyone's slowness. We were as weary as anyone, but we didn't care.

The end of our patience came during a rest on the march not ten miles from the fort. The men were supine, exhausted. I followed their example for a moment, then sat up restlessly.

"Let's ride," I said to Conan. "We can't wait for these turtles forever!"

His eyes were red from lack of sleep, as no doubt were my own. Yet he

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

scrambled to his feet on the instant. "Right!" he said. "They can find their way home."

Knowing how much I prized it, he had given me the great bay; and he himself had confiscated an excellent horse to replace the one Chilbert had killed. Worn too, they still had enough more vitality than most of the other mounts to save us a good hour or so.

We were happy men as we rode, proud of achievement, glad of life, liking the future. We sang in spite of our dusty mouths, and each laughed at everything the other said, whether he had listened to it or not. Conscious as we were of our pleasure in each other's company, our minds were ahead of us. We'd done a good job, and we wanted to tell our women about it.

NATURALLY messengers had brought the general good news to the fort, but that wouldn't spoil the personal conferences we were anticipating. When at last I saw the walls of the stronghold I drew in my breath like a child at sight of a honey comb. I had dreamed of it, and here it was. Before an hour had passed, I swore, I'd ask my girl to share my well earned winnings.

The watchers had marked us, and everybody, in the place crowded around us, asking questions. Conan kissed Ann and then bellowed at them, grinning. "Can't a tired man get any privacy with his own wife? We'll talk it over in the morning, but let me alone now."

In spite of his good humor he made his point sharply enough, and they left us. I looked around, feeling cheated and terrifically disappointed.

"Where's Marie?" I asked.

Ann looked at Conan and received no more help than a fatuous smile. Her eyes seemed very serious. "Why she's in the hall, Finnian."

"Anything the matter with her?" I inquired anxiously.

"No. She wants to see you, but not with other people around. She has something to say to you."

Private talk with her was what I myself earnestly desired. "That's fine!" I said, brightening. "I've got some things to say to her." I winked at Conan; he laughed.

Ann suddenly broke from her husband's arms. "Go over there," she called over her shoulder, pointing to a deserted corner of the court. "I'll send her out to you."

Conan slapped me on the back. "Good luck, brother! Marie's a fine girl." It was the first time her name had been used between us.

So I limped stiffly across the court and leaned against the wall. I wouldn't look at her as she came up to greet me. I'd wait to see what her spontaneous words of salutation would be. In a minute I heard a step, but not a woman's. I turned my head, annoyed. Raymond was approaching.

I was feeling too pleased with the world to be angry, but if there was anything I didn't want around then it was another man.

"Glad to see you up and about," I told him, "but I'll tell you more about that later. I'm waiting here for somebody now."

He drew a breath and braced his legs. "I've got to tell you myself," he said in a flat voice. "You want that girl, and so do I—but she wants me, not you." He spread his arms. "Hit me! Kill me, if you think you've got the right! But it won't change that."

I stared at him, feeling stunned and battered. My intense fatigue didn't let me react very fast, and the preconception I'd lived with so long was not easily displaced. But even though I didn't grasp the full import, I knew, thinking back. It was this of which Ann had tried to warn me.

I couldn't say anything, so he went on. It must have been hard work for him, but I only appreciated that later.

"You wouldn't have done it to me, maybe. I didn't want to do it to you. It just happened." His mouth worked. "I knew you wanted her, and you've been my friend and more than that. You're my chief! But she and I—after the first week or so we knew." He drew himself up, quivering. "What are you going to say? What are you going to do?"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I LOOKED at him dully, feeling all my weariness then with a vengeance. Well, if it was so, it was so; but I didn't want to talk about it any more.

"It's all right," I said.

He broke the skin on his knuckles hitting the wall. "It isn't all right, but—"

I smiled, though not much. "But you'll do what you're going to do, as everybody else does. And why shouldn't you? God knows I don't want a woman who doesn't want me." I touched his arm lightly. "You're friend still, but let's drop the subject."

With one last hang-dog look he left me, and I gazed out through the open gate and across the dropped drawbridge, symbols of the new peace in the land. The burn of the pain would come after a while; now I was merely getting used to the knowledge that preceded it.

The vision I had been living with and on for the past few weeks had been all imagination. No, not entirely that, either. She had had it in her mind also, but only, humiliatingly enough, because there had been nobody else around. Then along had come this lad.

I wanted to sit down, but there was no place unless I walked for it, so I just stood there. There would be no woman, no son, no hall. Somebody else was drawing near, and I looked around with sodden irritability. It was Marie herself, the last person I wanted to see.

"Raymond told me." Then I said to her what I had said to him. "It's all right."

But she wouldn't go away. "I'm sorry, Finnian," she said.

My nerves were jumping, but I tried not to raise my voice. "It's over," I said. "Words are good for nothing now."

Her face was drawn with effort, but she continued to face me. Women fight for what they want with as much courage as men, and with more specific knowledge of their needs; and she wanted something of me.

"There's something we've *got* to talk about," she said desperately.

I felt like a sick man without strength enough to strike at a hovering gad fly. "What?" I asked.

"You'll be going away now, won't you?" she remarked rather than inquired.

Glancing through the gate again at the road beyond, I realized what had been on my mind since Raymond had spoken. Yes, I would be going away. There would be no use remaining, seeing that I had nothing more to do there. I would be welcome to stay with Conan, but even in my lost state of mind I shied at the picture of myself as the favored and indulged hanger-on, growing more purposeless by the month.

No, the whole bright concept of existence there had depended on Marie, and it had shattered because of her. And she knew that, as well as what I would do about it. Abstractedly I wondered how she could know that much about me and still feel alien. But she did. Remembering, I saw that she had always liked me, yet had been repelled.

"You'll be going away?" she repeated.

"Sure," I said. "Now won't you go away yourself? I don't feel like conversation."

HER next words, however, intrigued my distraught attention. "But if you stayed you could have all the land you wanted. Conan would give you anything."

I looked at her curiously before I nodded. "Yes, he'd give me anything except Ann and his half of the bottle."

She moistened her lips. "We need that land, Raymond and I. Conan would never give us any, because he'll hold us responsible for driving you away. But if you're not using your land, there's no reason why we can't."

"I haven't got any land," I said brusquely. "It's all Conan's."

"Yes, but Conan owes you something, owes you a lot!" She reached for my hand. "Ask him for land! Raymond's your man, and you can tell Conan that he'll hold it in your name. Look, Finnian! Conan needs chiefs. I've heard him say so myself. And Raymond would make a good one."

She wasn't just praising her lover. She was telling the truth. I would be doing

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

no disservice to my friend by sponsoring this lad's promotion. He would, I was convinced, do a good job. Marie was leaning toward me, peering to read my mind.

"Finnian!" she cried urgently. "You must!"

Why must I, I wondered. I almost said it out loud.

I glowered at her. A bargain that would favor all parties and wouldn't harm me waited but my word. If I failed to give it I'd feel small and mean about it the rest of my life; and of that she was keenly aware. I tried frantically to find some excuse, but there was none. She had me cornered.

"I'll speak to Conan," I told her, still somehow keeping my voice quiet.

"Oh, Finnian!" The wealth of emotion in her tone soured me yet further, because I knew it was really meant for another man. Nevertheless, she persisted in remaining.

"I—we have been good friends, Finnian," she said, "and—"

"Well, what do you want now?"

"You've meant much in my life, and right now may be the last time we'll really talk together." She drew a step nearer, so that our bodies were almost touching. "I'd like to kiss you goodbye, Finnian."

A vein started throbbing in my temple, then at last my anger broke. "Kiss you, you conniving brat!" I roared at her. "I'd rather break your damned neck! Now get the hell out of my sight and stay there!"

For once she had no answer for me. She turned away, sobbing a little, but I had no remorse. She had just kicked the only good idea for a life I'd ever had into pieces. Moreover, she had made me pay her dowry so that she could marry somebody else. Well and good, but kiss her on top of that! A man can be noble to just such and such an extent without turning his own stomach.

And that was that.

Once more I looked out over the bridge, knowing with unshakable positiveness that a clear way lay before me. No further incidents would occur to keep me in this country which had held so much for me. The power of the Pict, or whatever it was, was through with me.

That guy!

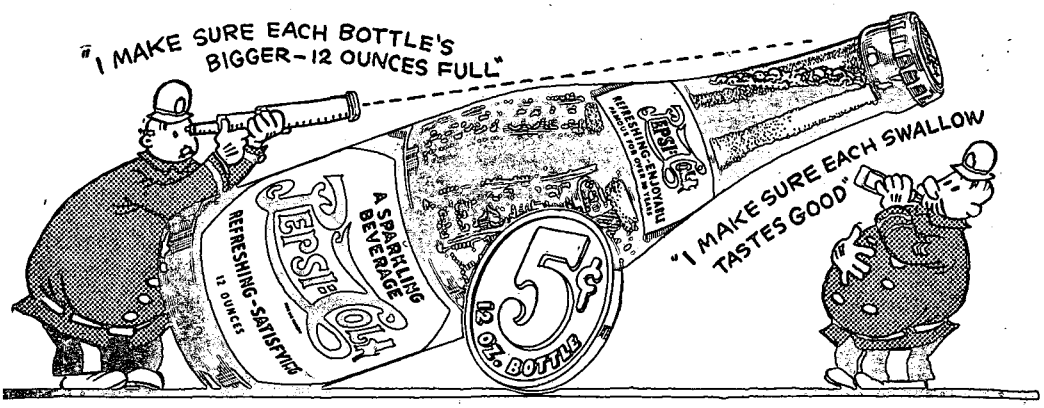
Oh, well. I began limping toward where Conan was waiting. Ann had sense enough to walk away when she saw me coming; but she would have told him, and he would have known better than to try to dissuade me from leaving.

He looked as done in and dispirited as I felt while I drew near where he stood with sagging shoulders, gazing at me haggardly through sweat-lank hair that he didn't bother to brush from his eyes.

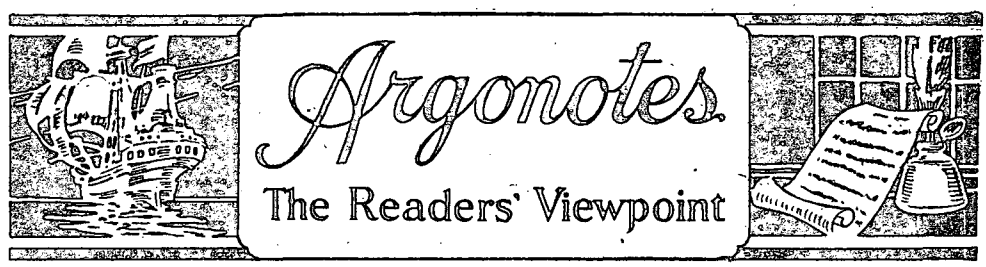
"Let's get drunk," he said when we had looked at each other a minute.

"Thank God for the wine," I said.

THE END



PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



WE ARE coming more and more to rely on you readers to do our work for us. Perhaps we ought to distribute certificates proclaiming you associate editors in good standing. As for the reward—isn't the glory enough? (Don't bother to answer that one.)

What we are getting around to is this: There's another job of identifying an old story to be done. Details—none too complete—are given in the letter below; and we haven't a doubt that you will supply the necessary information in short order. Remember the Hastings correspondence? So do we; and we're thinking of hiring a couple of extra girls to handle your answers to

W. L. FISCHER

I crave information. Is there a remote chance of getting copies of a serial published between 1920 and 1928? Don't remember the exact dates and am not positive of the name of the story, but I believe it was called "The Torch."

This story hinged around an imaginary invasion of the United States; it described the rebuilding of the country, and at the end the torch was rekindled in the Statue of Liberty. The story impressed my juvenile mind more than any I have ever read, and so I would like a chance to re-read it.

Sometimes I swear by all that's holy—no more ARGOSY; the stories are punk. Then along comes a beauty, so another dime leaves my pocket. I have missed three copies in—well, years. I don't remember when I started, but my Dad blistered my hide, saying I was too young for this blood and thunder.

LOS ANGELES, CAL.

SO THERE'S the problem. Dig back into your memories and your files—with more success, we hope, than we've had. . . . The next note is from a lady who was deeply impressed by the latest Kildare story. She isn't alone in her enthusiasm; we and a good many other people join her.

MRS. GRANT HOPKINS

It is almost impossible for me to find time to write these few words. I wish to thank you for the pure delight and change I have enjoyed while reading "Dr. Kildare Goes Home." A superb triumph for love and kindness.

May the good work increase.

FULTON, KANSAS

14 BOX ASSORTMENTS 30¢ EACH UP-ODD CARDS 2½¢ EACH
Sell 50 Assorted Name Imprinted CHRISTMAS CARDS for $1
FREE SAMPLES
MAKE EXTRA MONEY EASILY.
Send today for free samples of our exclusive $1.00 line of outstanding Personal Cards and distinctive Imprinted Stationery. Request $1.00 box assortment on approval. Get free money making details.
NEW ENGLAND ART PUBLISHERS
Dept. 581 North Abington, Mass.

TRAIN FOR Electricity
We'll Finance Your Tuition
Learn by Doing, in 12 weeks, in big shops of Coyne—Not home study or correspondence. Earn while learning. Free employment service after graduation. Write for details of my Pay after Graduation Plan and Free book.
COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL, Dept. CO-52,
500 South Paulina Street • • Chicago, Illinois

New Catalog
—of Bargains in Military, Outdoor and Sport Goods, Clothes, Shoes, Boots, Blankets, Tents, Firearms, Boy Scout Supplies, etc. Send 10¢ for copy to be redeemed on first order.
A AND N SUPPLY CO.
4782 Lester St.
Richmond, Virginia
ESTD. 1868

STOP the ITCH of Insect Bites Heat Ra
For quick relief from itching of insect bites, heat rash, athlete foot, hives, eczema and other externally caused skin trouble use world-famous, cooling, antiseptic, liquid D.D.D. Prescription. Greaseless, stainless. Soothes irritation and quickly stops the most intense itching. 35c trial bottle proves it, or money back. Ask your druggist today for D. D. D. PRESCRIPTION

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Who Knows China?

China—***vast, ancient, and mysterious***—civilized when Europeans lived in caves. Its people once knew the secret of welding together magic, metals, and precious stones to create articles of surpassing beauty.

Such a treasure is the ***Dragon Glass,*** an exquisite mirror, reflecting the magnificence of the Orient, yet ***so cursed that even the ancients hid it from the light of day.***

The story of this weird mirror is told by **A. MERRITT,** that master of imaginative fiction, in the world famous tale

Through the Dragon Glass

a classic of fantasy, complete in the September issue of

FANTASTIC NOVELS

NOW ON THE STANDS • 20¢

If your dealer cannot supply you with this RED STAR magazine of fantastic classics, send 20¢ to 280 Broadway, N. Y. C., and a copy will be mailed to you promptly.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

FASTER! FASTER!

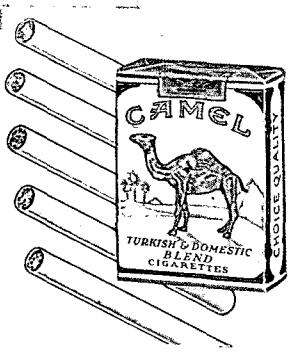
"Speed's the thing in aquaplaning," says Florence Holliss, "but in a cigarette the fun and the *extras* go with slower burning...with Camels."

A THRILL in every wave—a breath-taking bounce that says, *hang on or take your ducking!* Florence Holliss, above, likes the fast pace in sports. But in cigarettes, she prefers the slower-burning brand... Camels.

SLOWER BURNING MAKES SUCH A DIFFERENCE. THE MORE I SMOKE CAMELS, THE MORE I APPRECIATE THEIR MILDNESS AND COOLNESS. CAMELS GIVE ME EXTRA PLEASURE AND EXTRA SMOKING, TOO

"THE FASTER THE PACE, the more the fun," says Florence Holliss, above. That goes for all her favorite sports... aquaplaning, tennis, riding. But she likes her smoking *slow*. "I always smoke Camels," Florence says. "They burn slower and make smoking so much more enjoyable. Camels are extra mild and extra cool—and they have such a welcome flavor." Make Camels your cigarette and enjoy *extra pleasure* and *extra smoking* (see right).

EVERY DAY more and more smokers are discovering that the important "extras" in cigarette pleasure and value go with slow burning... Camels. For slow burning preserves and heightens natural tobacco flavor and fragrance... means freedom from the excess heat and irritating qualities of too-fast burning. Camels, with their costlier tobaccos and a slower way of burning unequaled in recent tests (*see below*), give you extra mildness, extra coolness, extra flavor... and extra smoking per pack.



In recent laboratory tests, CAMELS burned 25% *slower* than the average of the 15 other of the largest-selling brands tested—slower than *any* of them. That means, on the average, a smoking *plus* equal to

5 EXTRA SMOKES PER PACK!

Copyright, 1940, R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Co., Winston-Salem, N. C.

SLOWER-BURNING CAMELS GIVE YOU—

EXTRA MILDNESS **EXTRA COOLNESS** **EXTRA FLAVOR**

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED